

# The Alaskan Shepherd



Volume 48 Number 1

January-February 2010

*Some give by going to the Missions*

*Some go by giving to the Missions*

*Without both there are no Missions*

## YEAR OF THE ALASKAN PRIEST: Part II

1) Bishop Donald J. Kettler 2) Father Stanislaw Jaszek 3) Father Gregg D. Wood, S.J. 4) Father Roman P. Caly 5) Father Frederick C. Bayler 6) Father Theodore E. Kestler, S.J. 7) Father Kasparaj Mallavarapu 8) Father Charles J. Peterson, S.J. 9) Father John B. Martinek 10) Father Normand A. Pepin, S.J. 11) Father Jack de Verteuil 12) Father Joseph Hemmer, O.F.M. 13) Father Patrick D. Bergquist 14) Father Ross A. Tozzi 15) Father Thomas G. Provinsal, S.J. 16) Father Robert Fath 17) Father Sean P. Thomson 18) Father Miroslaw Woznica



In December of 2009, we bade goodbye to the old year by beginning a series featuring our now eighteen priests. These priests are tasked to bring the Mass and Sacraments to an area spanning over 409,849

square miles, roughly 22,700 square miles each. Ten of these dedicated priests cover the most remote and widely spread out area of our diocese, an area home to 38 of our 46 parishes. This isolated area can be reached only by plane. During the short summer months, some Missionaries within this area can get to their villages by boat; during the long winter months, by snowmachine. Truly, the Northern Alaskan Priest finds himself living in much the same way as his parishioners: isolated, self-reliant, often without the basic amenities of modern life, among them running water.

Only nine of our bush parishes boast a resident priest. Picture if you will, communities unable to celebrate Mass on a weekly basis, especially in the majority of our bush parishes. Here, a priest must cover several villages on a rotating basis: two weeks at one parish, two weeks at the other.

In March of 2009, Pope Benedict XVI declared a “Year For Priests” beginning with the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on June 19, 2009. This new Jubilee Year will conclude with an international gathering of priests with the Holy Father this June 19.

It is my great joy to present to you this second installment, Part II, featuring our Alaskan Priests. I am able to do so thanks to the assistance of Father Louis L. Renner, S.J., and his writings compiled throughout his over 20 years as Editor of *The Alaskan Shepherd* newsletter and that many years again as an Alaskan priest, teacher, scholar, and adventurer. You can learn more about him by reading his autobiography, *A Kindly Providence*, and more about the Priests featured here by reading about

**CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA**  
**1312 PEGER ROAD FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709**  
**Phone: 907-374-9532    <http://www.cbna.info>**

*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.*

them in his *Alaskana Catholica*, a history of the Church in Alaska which has sold over 1200 copies, directly from our little Shepherd office. (Father Renner resides at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, and is now in his 84th year. Father Renner served 40-plus years in Alaska and serves the Diocese of Fairbanks still.)

I hope, in the Holy Father's Jubilee "Year For Priests," that you are able to join us "on the trail," in this second issue featuring Fathers Jack de Verteuil, John B. Martinek, Joseph Hemmer, Franciscan, and Ross A. Tozzi. —Patty Walter

### FATHER JACK DE VERTEUIL

Jack de Verteuil was born on February 11, 1942, in Trinidad, British West Indies. In 1953, the family immigrated to Canada. In 1965, he graduated from King's College, London, Ontario, with a B.A. degree in English and History. "The years from 1965-87," in his words, "were a quilted patchwork of work and study: teaching high school in the Yukon Territory and Central, B.C.; work at an asbestos mine in the Yukon; stock room clerk for Simpson-Sears in Vancouver, B.C.; and then a social worker for Catholic Community Services, also in Vancouver."

During one of his teaching years, Jack was intrigued by a colleague's statement: "While man can invent many wondrous things, he cannot invent himself." This remark led to a deep interest in philosophy and theology on Jack's part. Impressed by the missionary work being done in northern Canada by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, he joined that Congregation, in the late 1970s. In 1982, he obtained a Bachelor of Theology degree from Newman Theological College, St. Albert, Alberta, Canada. However, realizing that he was not called to be an "Order" priest, he left the Oblates and went to Spokane, Washington, where, in August 1987, he entered Mater Dei Institute. Sponsored by Gonzaga University, the institute offered a seminary program for older men aspiring to the priesthood. Mater Dei was founded by Jesuit Fathers Armand M. Nigro, Vincent J. Beuzer, and John J. Evoy, its first Rector-President. Jack singled Father Nigro out as one who was especially helpful to him on his journey to the priesthood.

In 1988, Jack earned his M.A. degree in Spirituality from Gonzaga University and was ordained a deacon. He spent his diaconate year, 1988-89, at St. Michael's parish in McGrath, Alaska. There he lived through "the great cold of January

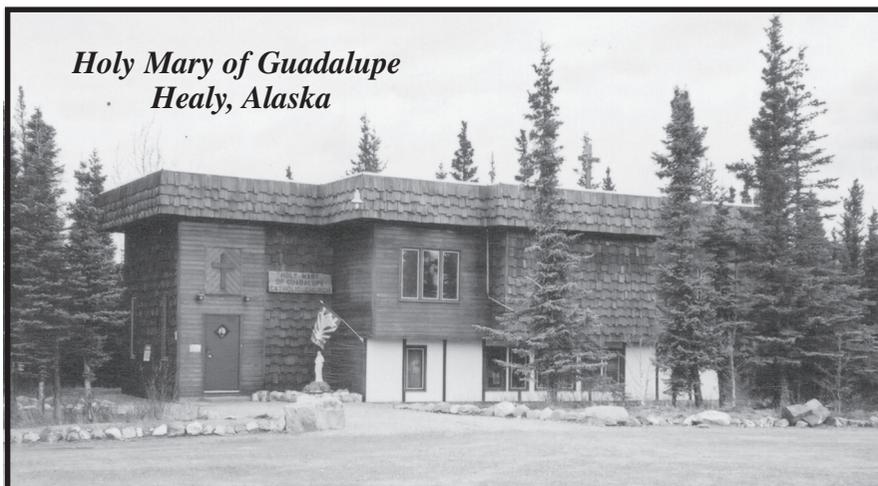


1989." He saw the temperature plummet to a record low of minus 76 degrees. For weeks, no planes flew.

On October 28, 1989, Jack was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Fairbanks, in Sacred Heart Cathedral, Fairbanks, by Michael J. Kaniecki, S.J., Bishop of Fairbanks at the time. Father de Verteuil spent his first year as a priest at St. Nicholas parish in North Pole.

In 1990, he was appointed assistant pastor of St. Joseph's parish in Nome. As such, he served also as visiting priest to St. Joseph's dependent stations: Teller, Little Diomed Island, and Unalakleet.

In 1994, Father de Verteuil became pastor of the so-called "Railbelt"—the communities strung out for 110 miles along the Parks Highway and the Alaska Railroad from Nenana all the way to Cantwell. For the first two years, he made his headquarters in Nenana, out of which he visited Anderson, Clear Air Force



Radar Station, Healy, Cantwell, and Denali National Park. In 1996, he began to make his headquarters in Healy, visiting the above-mentioned places out of there. It was not long before he recognized, and gratefully acknowledged, deep indebtedness to both Sister Agnes Wilcox, S.M.S.M., long-time Pastoral Administrator of the Nenana parish, and to Barbara Walters, Pastoral Administrator of the Healy parish since 1980, the year of its founding. He came to regard both as “the two keys to successful ministry on the Railbelt.”

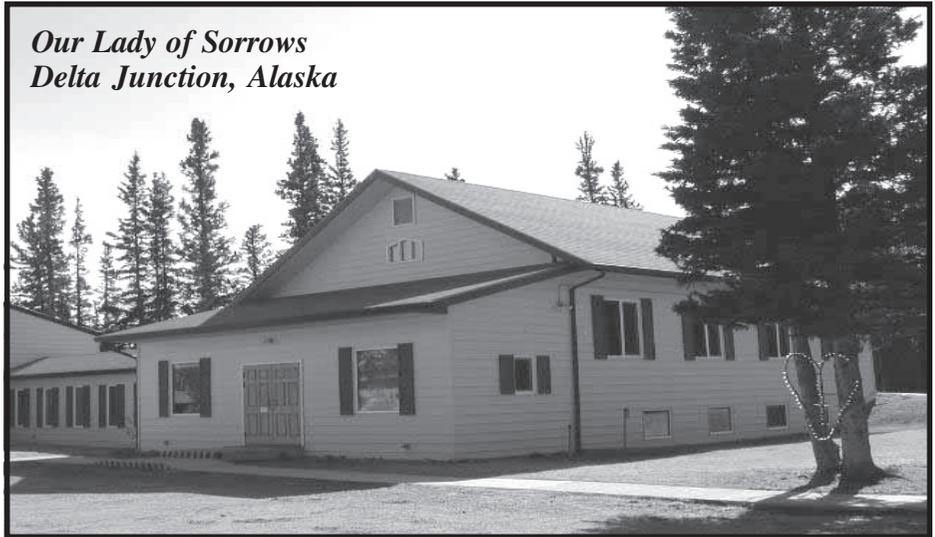
An avid downhill skier, as well as an enthusiastic professional sports fan, Father de Verteuil found relaxation on the slopes, or in front of a TV set watching the Houston Oilers or the Montreal Canadians or the Toronto Blue Jays. He found peace and relaxation, too, in taking “Sibir,” his Siberian Husky, on long wilderness walks. Punning on his first name, he admitted to being “a jack-of-all-trades, and a master of none.” First and foremost, he has been a committed priest of the Lord. The year 2010 finds Father Jack still ministering to the “Railbelt” communities.

**FATHER JOHN B. MARTINEK**

John B. Martinek, son of Raymond G. and Rose B. Novak Martinek, was born on March 6, 1947, in Edgerton, Wisconsin. In 1952, he moved with his parents back to their hometown of Chicago. There he attended parochial schools for his elementary education. In 1961, he entered Quigley Preparatory Seminary South, the minor seminary of the Archdiocese of Chicago. He was encouraged in his vocation to the priesthood by the example of his parents—very devout and active Catholics—and by that of their pastor, Father Aloysius A. Menarik. After graduating from Quigley in 1965, he continued his studies for the priesthood at Niles College of Loyola University, the archdiocesan major seminary.

John, along with other seminarians, spent the summer

*Our Lady of Sorrows  
Delta Junction, Alaska*



of 1966 in Mexico as part of a program coordinated by the Maryknoll Fathers. In the small village of Tlaxco, in the Sierra Madre Mountains southeast of Mexico City, he was involved in community organization and Religious education. It was a difficult summer for him, knowing little Spanish and being afflicted early on with dysentery. As the summer was drawing to a close, he had little intention of returning. On his final night in the village, two of the locals got involved in a gunfight over a card game.

One of the men died in John’s arms, as he and another seminarian tried to treat his wounds. The people of the village, who had been very kind to and patient with the seminarians, were sure that they would never see these Americans again. However, as the single-engine plane lifted off from the cow pasture “airport,” John and fellow seminarians on board vowed that they would return. During the next four summers, he was back in Mexico. His subsequent involvement in Hispanic ministry in inner-city Chicago was traceable back to those five summers in the remote mountains of Mexico.

After graduating from Niles College with a B.A. degree in sociology in 1969, John continued his education toward



the priesthood at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois. During his years there, he helped out in the Hispanic parishes on Chicago's Westside, working especially with Latino street gangs. He became involved also as a legal aide and interpreter at the Cook County jail and the county criminal court. His final year of preparation for the diaconate saw him at St. Mary of the Lake parish, Chicago. He was ordained a priest on May 9, 1973, by Cardinal John P. Cody, Archbishop of Chicago.

Father Martinek's first assignment as a priest was to St. Jerome's parish, Chicago, where he ministered especially to the Cuban exile community and to the children in the parish school. From 1974-78, he taught Spanish and Religion at the Quigley seminary, meanwhile also ministering, as time allowed, to Hispanic parishioners in the several different parishes in which he resided.

After four years of teaching in the minor seminary, Father Martinek felt a strong call to return to full-time parish ministry. For the next 13 years, from 1978-91, he served in a number of different parishes, now as associate pastor, now as pastor. In 1983, he was named pastor of St. Ann's parish. During his final six years as pastor of that 1500-family parish, he was the only priest there. Most of his ministry continued to be to Hispanic parishioners. Toward the end of his years at St. Ann's, both of his parents became seriously ill. An only child, he gave as much time as his parish responsibilities allowed caring for them. After his mother died in 1989, and his father in 1990, he recognized that his caring for them and his parish ministry had drained him both emotionally and physically, and that he needed to get away for a time to revitalize himself.

In 1991, Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago graciously and generously accepted his resignation as pastor of St. Ann's parish and granted him six months to travel and renew himself. On April 7, 1991, the Sunday after Easter Sunday, Father Martinek began what he calls "the great adventure." He loaded a tent, a sleeping bag, and his two dogs in the back of a Jeep, and began a drive to Alaska by way of Nova Scotia and over the back roads of Canada. He arrived in Alaska in June for what he thought was a once-in-a-lifetime visit. "As I experienced the beauty," he wrote, "of mountains and rivers, the wildlife and the wilderness of Canada and Alaska, all opening to me the beauty and love of God, I gradually began to be renewed in body and in spirit." As he was returning to the Lower 48, he became aware of a desire in him to return to Alaska, not just as a visitor, but as a priest. In San Francisco, he abandoned his further planned itinerary, and drove back to Alaska, to talk to Michael J. Kaniecki, S.J., Bishop of Fairbanks at the time, about the possibilities of ministering in the Diocese of Fairbanks. Bishop Kaniecki's reaction was favorable.

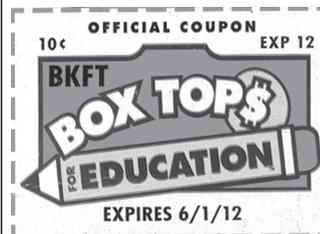
In September 1991, Father Martinek returned to Chicago, as scheduled, and continued on in a program of personal renewal. During this, he discussed with Cardinal Bernardin the possibility of his ministering in Alaska. Rather reluctantly, the Cardinal gave him permission to serve in the Diocese of Fairbanks, "on loan," for three years.

In December 1991, Father Martinek began his Alaskan ministry, among the Koyukon Athabaskan Indians along the middle Yukon River, as pastor of Our Lady of the Snows parish in Nulato, and as visiting priest to its two dependent missions, Koyukuk and Kaltag. Travel by snowmachine and boat was something new to him. However, after being patiently instructed and guided by men of the village, he was soon at ease "traveling the river," whether by snowmachine or boat. Before long, he came to enjoy the wilderness trips and "the peace of being in the beauty of God's creation." While in Nulato, after spending the morning hours in prayer and doing maintenance work around the church/residence building, he generally spent the afternoons doing "the main village activity," visiting homes, where he felt he did his most effective pastoral care work.

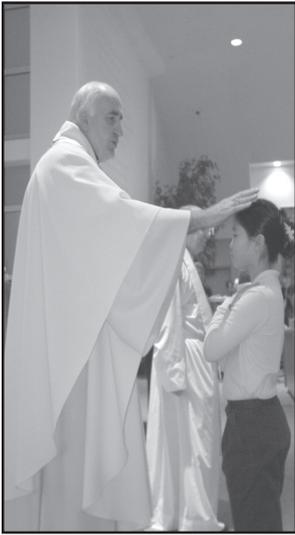
After some three years on the middle Yukon—and after Cardinal Bernardin had granted him another, and "final," three years in Alaska—Father Martinek, in 1995, took on the assignment of pastor of St. Francis Xavier parish in Kotzebue. There he found himself in the land of the Inupiat Eskimos. He found himself also in a land not without natural wonders of its own. With the pen of a poet, he wrote: "In December, we get down to less than three hours of 'daylight.' This, in reality, is no more than a twilight, when the sun, barely brushing the southern

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**ALASKAN SHEPHERD 1312 PEGER ROAD FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709-5199**

Dear Friends of the Missionary Diocese of Fairbanks:

Sixty-four years ago, in September 1946, under the supervision of Father Edmund Anable, S.J., and the Sisters of Providence, fifty-five 1st-4th grade students began classes in the basement of Fairbanks' historic Immaculate Conception Church. In 1951, six construction camp buildings and the old army officers club were moved to a site on Noyes Slough. These buildings, arranged under a single roof, became the home of Immaculate Conception School and of 115 elementary students. In 1955, the first 9th grade class met at Immaculate Conception Church. In 1956, a \$400,000 high school, named after Father Francis Monroe, S.J., founder of the first Catholic Parish in Fairbanks, was completed and opened. On May 29, 1959, Alaska was celebrating its first year of statehood, as Fairbanks' Monroe Catholic High School graduated its first senior class, a class of six. By 1978, enough funding had been secured for construction of a two-story elementary school. In 1980, the first parent-funded kindergarten was held. Today, there are 450 students reaping the benefits of a Catholic education in Fairbanks.

Immaculate Conception School and Monroe High School comprise the only K-12 Catholic school system in Alaska. Situated in Fairbanks, just 100 miles south of the Arctic Circle, these schools educate students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some live within walking distance, others travel 25 miles by bus or car, and still others have left their home villages and towns to board in Fairbanks to attend a Catholic school. The Catholic Schools of Fairbanks provide an educational environment that is rooted in faith, rich in academic excellence, strengthened by service and nurtured by community.

Until the 1980's, ICS and Monroe employed a large number of Religious, both men and women, and members of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. In the last 20 years, the JVC has turned its resources to other areas and there has been a significant decline in the number of Religious. The Religious and the volunteers donated a tremendous amount of time and energy at a very low cost. The increases in educational costs have gone largely to paying teachers and staff.

That is why we find ourselves knocking at your door. Contributing to the Catholic Schools of Fairbanks will ensure that the schools will be able to pay for textbooks, computer supplies, salaries, maintenance costs, and other costs associated with running a school. Additionally, your donation will help keep tuitions at affordable levels so that more families will be able to have the choice in the education of their children. Finally, you will be part of a tradition of giving--dating back to 1946, when the schools opened in the basement of Immaculate Conception Church.

With all sincere, grateful, best wishes,

*+ Donald J. Kettler*

+Donald J. Kettler,  
Bishop of Fairbanks

*All donors are truly co-missionaries, since they alone make possible our work for the Lord and His Kingdom.*

**TO: CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA** (our legal title): 1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-5199

**Dear Bishop Kettler:**

**F12 2010**

Enclosed is my special donation to the *Catholic Schools of Fairbanks Annual Fund*, a fund intended exclusively to help alleviate operational costs at the school. I am enclosing a check for:

\$15    \$25    \$50    \$100    \$250    \$1860 (tuition gap)    Other\$ \_\_\_\_\_

Additionally, as a member of the Alaskan Shepherd "*Buck-A-Month Club*" I enclose my contribution to assist the Mission parishes of the Diocese of Fairbanks:

**F01 2010**

\$12    \$15    \$25    \$50    \$100    \$250    Other\$ \_\_\_\_\_

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P.O.Box \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

If donating by **check** please make payable to: **CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA** or **CBNA**

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TO: CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA  
1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-5199

*Please remember the following petitions during the Novena of Grace:*

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## ***NOVENA OF GRACE***

Each year during the month of March, a Novena is offered for you, our benefactors, and for your petitions.

The Novena of Grace is so called because countless people have had their prayers answered by God through the intercession of St. Francis Xavier, the Jesuit Apostle to the Orient in the sixteenth century and the patron saint of worldwide missions.

We invite you to send us your petitions. Both you and your needs will be remembered on each of the nine days. The Fathers on the missions also will remember you and your intentions in their Masses and prayers during the Novena.

We invite all of you to join us in this Novena of Grace by reciting--from the 4th of March to the 12th inclusive--the following prayers.

*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.*

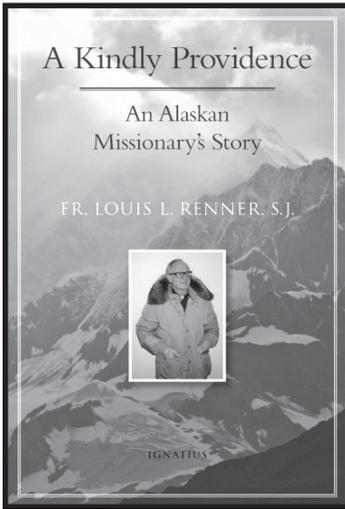
**Our Father; Hail Mary; Glory be to the Father.**

**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.**



**A KINDLY PROVIDENCE:**

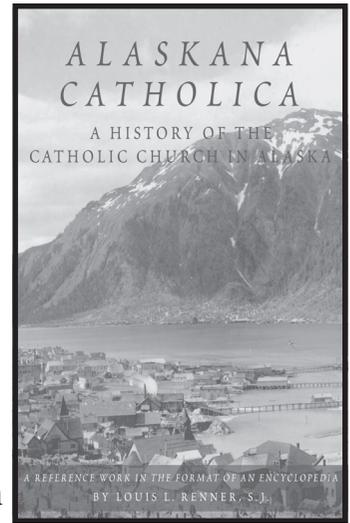
*An Alaskan Missionary's Story*  
**By Fr. Louis L. Renner, S.J.**

(Paperback 507 pages) \$35.00, includes shipping.

**ALASKANA CATHOLICA:**

*A History of the Catholic Church in Alaska*  
**By Fr. Louis L. Renner, S.J.**

(Hardcover 702 pages) \$85.00 includes shipping.



In *Alaskana Catholica*, Fr. Renner offers a thorough picture of the Catholic Church's ministerial activity in

Alaska from its beginning in the nineteenth century to the present. In his autobiography, *A Kindly Providence*, he tells the story of a dedicated missionary priest. A scholar, a teacher, and always a Jesuit priest, he taught German and Latin at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, edited the Catholic newsletter *The Alaskan Shepherd*, and served as pastor of two different Indian villages on the Yukon River during his 40 years in Alaska. He was a recipient of the "Governor's Award for Friend of the Humanities," in 2002. The two books, both richly illustrated, are now available from the *Alaskan Shepherd*. The books are perfect gifts, whether to give or to receive!

*Proceeds benefit the Catholic Missions of Northern Alaska. [www.cbna.info](http://www.cbna.info)*

**Yes, please send \_\_\_\_\_ copy(ies) of *Alaskana Catholica*,  
 written by Father Louis L. Renner, S.J.**

I am enclosing \$85.00 for each book, which includes shipping.

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**Father Frederick C. Bayler**  
Sacred Heart Cathedral/Fairbanks



**Father Mirosław Woznica**  
Immaculate Conception Church/Fairbanks



**Father Patrick D. Bergquist**  
St. Raphael Church/Fairbanks



**Father Normand A. Pepin, S.J.**  
Chaplain Catholic Schools/  
House of Prayer



**Father Kasparaj Mallavarapu**  
St. Mark University Parish/College/Barrow

**Father Sean P. Thomson**  
St. Mark University Parish/College/Prison Ministry

**Father Robert Fath**  
St. Nicholas Church/North Pole



**RURAL ROAD PARISHES**

**Father John B. Martinek**  
Delta Junction/Tok

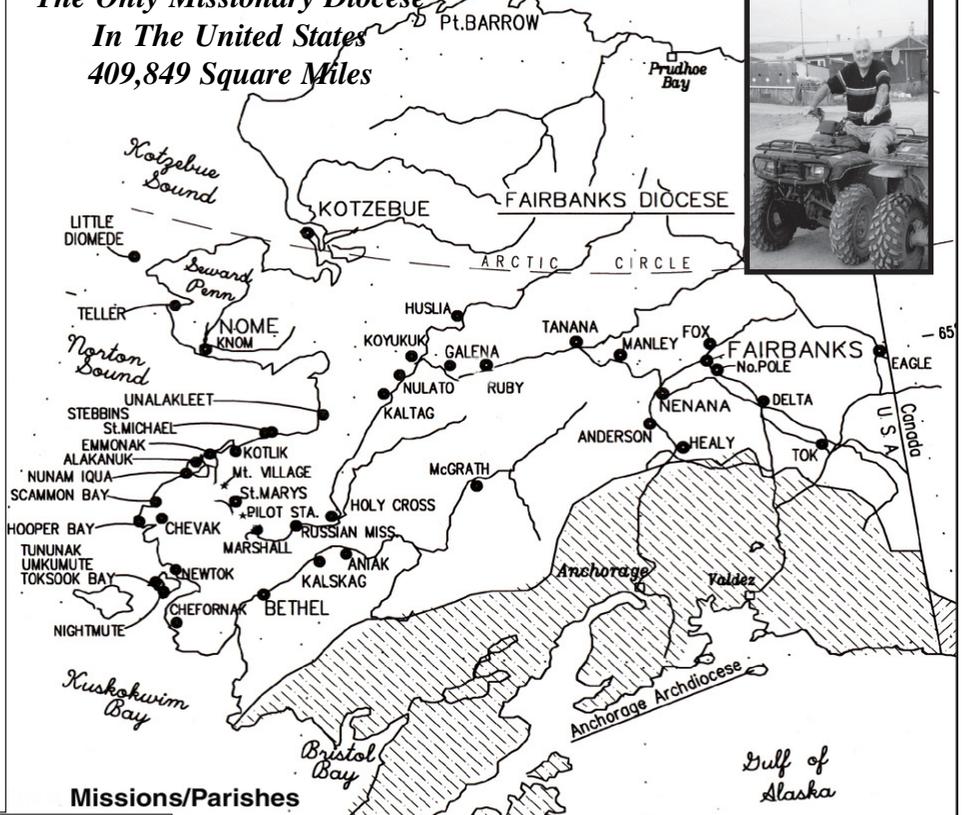


**Father Jack de Verteuil**  
Healy/Nenana /Denali Park/  
Clear AFB



**Bishop Donald J. Kettler Diocese of Fairbanks**

*The Only Missionary Diocese  
In The United States  
409,849 Square Miles*



**BUSH YK-DELTA PARISHES/NON-ROAD**

**Father Roman P. Caly**  
**YK Subregion A**  
Emmonak/Alakanuk/Nunum Iqua/Kotlik/Stebbins/  
St. Michael/Unalakleet



**Father Stanislaw Jaszek**  
**YK Subregion B**  
Aniak/Pilot Station/Mountain Village/Holy Cross/Kalskag



**Father Gregg D. Wood, S.J.**  
**YK Subregion C**  
Hooper Bay/Scammon Bay/Chevak



**Father Charles J. Peterson, S.J.**  
**YK Subregion C**  
Bethel/Marshall/Russian Mission



**Father Theodore E. Kestler, S.J.**  
**YK Subregion D**  
St. Marys/Nightmute



**Father Thomas G. Provinsal, S.J.**  
**YK Subregion D**  
Cheforanak /Tununak/Toksook Bay/Nelson Island/Newtok



**Father Ross A. Tozzi**  
Nome/Kotzebue/Teller/Diomedede



**RETIRED**

**Fr. Timothy L. Sander, O.S.B., 69 years a priest**



**Fr. John A. Hinsvark, 44 years a priest**

**BUSH INTERIOR PARISHES**

**Father Joseph Hemmer, O.F.M.**  
Ruby/Kaltag



**Brother Robert J. Ruzicka, O.F.M.**  
**Brother R. Justin Huber, O.F.M.**  
\*Nulato/Galena/Koyukuk/Huslia/  
McGrath/Tanana



\*These parishes currently without a priest visited  
by Fairbanks area priests.

**Yukon-Kuskokwim  
Subregions  
2009-10**



horizon, paints, in pastel colors, at the same time the sunrise and sunset across the sky, the frozen Sound, and the distant mountains.” He was fascinated, too, by the “brilliant displays of northern lights.”

After three years of ministry in Kotzebue, Father Martinek could write, “As I loved priestly ministry in the inner-city of Chicago, and loved priestly ministry on the middle Yukon, so I now love and find joy in priestly ministry here in Kotzebue.” That was in 1998, the year he celebrated his silver jubilee as a priest. By now, he was convinced that it was in Alaska that he wanted to spend the rest of his active years as a priest. While in Chicago for jubilee celebrations, he asked the new Archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Francis E. George, O.M.I., for permission to be incardinated into the Diocese of Fairbanks. Permission was granted. On January 1, 2000, Father Martinek officially became a priest of the Missionary Diocese of Fairbanks.

In the year 2002, Father Martinek ended his tenure in Kotzebue, to become pastor both of Our Lady of Sorrows parish in Delta Junction and of Holy Rosary parish in Tok, as well as visiting priest to the latter’s dependent mission, Eagle. For the first time, since he came to minister as a priest in Alaska, he was now on the highway system. To his joy, he was still, more than ever, surrounded by the beauties of the Alaskan wilderness, especially by mountains.

During his summers in Mexico as a seminarian, many years earlier, Father Martinek had prayed Psalm 121 every time he looked out the window toward the Sierra Madre Mountains. In Kotzebue, every time he went out the front door of St. Francis Xavier Church and looked across the waters of Kotzebue Sound to the mountains on the far side, he had prayed it. On his new assignment, too, as he drove between Delta Junction and Tok in the shadow of the Alaska Range, he continued to pray: *“I lift up my eyes toward the mountains: whence shall help come to me? My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”*

As of the year 2010, Father Martinek was still happily on the highway system southeast of Fairbanks.

#### **FATHER JOSEPH HEMMER, O.F.M.**

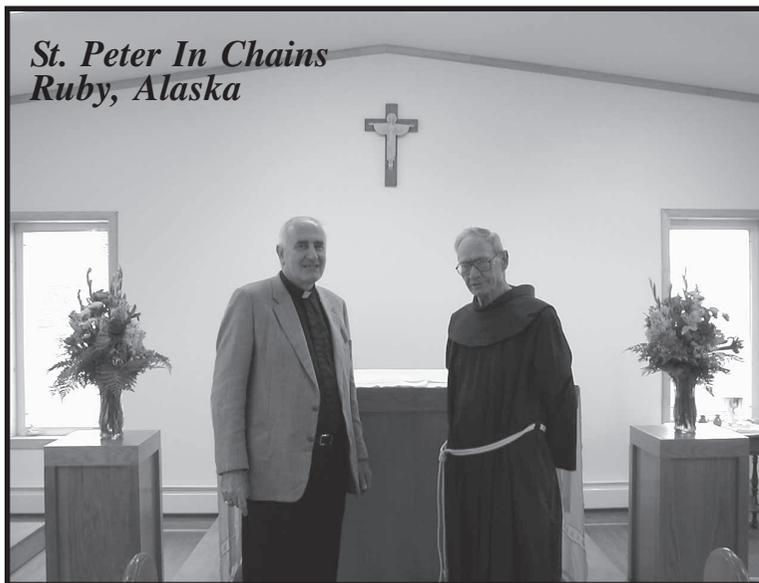
Joseph Hemmer was born in Cornlea, Nebraska, on December 23, 1927, the second son of nine children, five girls, and four boys. His parents, Albert and Antonetta, were farmers. “Church” was a very important part of family life. Two of his maternal aunts and a cousin were Sisters. For his elementary schooling, Joseph attended the local parish school, Sacred Heart, in Cornlea, from 1933-41. This was two miles from the family farm, so the Hemmer schoolchildren, after doing morning chores, commuted to it daily by horse and buggy. The school had a good reputation, because its graduates always did well in the State High School entrance exams.

One day, Joseph’s 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher spotted him studying a picture of a young man being especially cared for by a loving, gentle Christ. She asked him, “Would you like to be a priest?” Her question led to Joseph’s entering Saint Joseph Seminary, in Westmont, Illinois, for his high school studies. This seminary, a boarding school, was staffed by Franciscans of the Sacred Heart Province, headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri.

On July 3, 1946, Joseph entered the Franciscan novitiate of St. Francis in Teutopolis, Illinois. On July 4, 1947, he made his profession of simple vows. He then went on to three years of philosophical studies at Our Lady of Angels Seminary in Cleveland, Ohio. He took his solemn vows on July 4, 1950. From 1950-54, he made his theological studies at St. Joseph’s in Teutopolis. He was ordained a priest in Teutopolis on June 24, 1954.

Father Hemmer, along with the rest of his ordination class, spent his first year as a priest at Quincy University, in Quincy, Illinois, taking courses, working in parishes on weekends, and teaching religion classes in local grade and high schools. During the year 1955-56, he took courses in the Industrial Arts at the University of Nebraska, after which, from 1956-79, he was at Corpus Christi/Hales Franciscan High School in the heart of Chicago’s black community. At Corpus





*St. Peter In Chains  
Ruby, Alaska*

*Bishop Donald Kettler and Father Joseph Hemmer, O.F.M.,  
on the occasion of the new church dedication on June 12, 2005.*

Christi, he served both as a teacher and as its principal—“always deeply involved,” in his words.

In the mid-1970s, while still at Corpus Christi, Father Hemmer worked at Mercy Hospital during odd hours getting training as a hospital chaplain and earning his accreditation with the National Association of Catholic Chaplains. During those same years, he devoted his summers to doing “supply work” at two different parishes in Portland, Oregon.

In 1979, Father Hemmer celebrated his silver jubilee as a priest. He spent part of that year on a trip to South America. In Brazil, after he visited Manaus and Santarem on the Amazon, he flew south from Belem with a fellow Franciscan to Brasilia, Rio, and Sao Paulo.

During the years 1979-86, Father Hemmer was pastor of St. Jude’s parish, a needy, struggling parish shifting from white to black, in Warrensville, Ohio. The year 1986-87 was for him a sabbatical year, during which he updated his theology by spending a semester at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and a semester at the University of Notre Dame. He next spent a year, 1987-88, in chaplain ministry at Quincy University.

While still in the seminary, studying theology and, at the same time, editing an in-house mission magazine, Father Hemmer became interested in “the Church in faraway places.” When, in 1985, the call went out to members of the Sacred Heart Province for volunteers to serve among the Athabaskan Indians of northern Alaska, he found himself drawn to that ministry. However, at

the time he was still committed to St. Jude’s parish. When his pastorate at St. Jude’s was up, the need for a volunteer priest to serve in Alaska was still there. Thinking that ministry in Alaska would be “a great way to apply the skills developed down through the years,” he gladly volunteered, and was accepted, and told by his Father Provincial to buy a one-way ticket. That was in 1988.

By the time Father Hemmer arrived in Galena, an Athabaskan Indian village on the middle Yukon River, in the summer of 1988, the Franciscans were no longer being referred to, mistakenly, as the Sanfriscans, as they had been when they first arrived on the Yukon two years earlier. Upon his arrival in Galena, the people, who had seen a considerable number of teachers, State Troopers, Public Health employees—not to mention several Franciscan priests—come and go during the years immediately preceding, wondered out loud how long he would survive Alaska. He assured them that he intended to stay on the middle Yukon for at least ten years. His answer met with a lot of skepticism. They doubted that this priest from the big cities would survive long in “bush” Alaska, with its different culture, dusty gravel roads, mosquitoes, and long, dark, cold wintry nights.

For his first term in Alaska, Father Hemmer was stationed at Galena, from the summer of 1988 to the summer of 1994. Out of Galena, he served also as visiting priest to its dependent missions, the Athabaskan Indian villages of Ruby and Huslia. During his first winter in Galena, he lived through what has gone down in Alaskan history as “the Great Cold of January 1989.” In Galena, that January, an official low of minus 86 degrees was recorded.

The church-rectory structure in Galena, though virtually new when Father Hemmer arrived, had many flaws and shortcomings, and needed his constant attention. Calling on the practical skills he had acquired on the family farm, and while taking Industrial Arts courses, he was now himself able to make many badly needed improvements.

In the summer of 1994, Father Hemmer took up station in Kaltag, but continued to be visiting priest to Ruby. The Kaltag church, being relatively old, too, needed much repair work and upgrading. In the summer of 2002, in Kaltag, to replace the three tin caches there, he put up a new 30 x 40’ storage shed, with a 14 x 18’ heated workshop. In Ruby, he was part of the team that saw to the replacing of the 50-year-old church with a new one. It took a number of years, before the old church was

***We want to thank in a special way those of you who have included the Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska (our legal title) in your bequests and wills, and those of you who, at the time of the deaths of dear ones, have suggested that in their memory contributions be made to the Missions of Northern Alaska or to the Alaskan Shepherd Endowment Fund. A suggested wording: “I give, devise and bequeath to the Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska, 1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska...”***

repositioned to serve as an all-purpose building, and the new church virtually ready for dedication in the year 2004.

In the course of his many years on the middle Yukon, Father Hemmer, always responsible for more than one village, did more than his share of inter-village traveling. None of the villages in interior Alaska are connected by roads. During his earlier years on the Yukon, traveled by open boat, when the river was ice-free. In the winter, when the river was frozen over, or the trails paved with snow, he traveled by snowmachine. "By contrast," he wrote, after twelve years in Alaska, "flying in one of the bush planes borders on luxury. Nevertheless, travel of any kind in these parts, if it teaches a man nothing else, it does teach him patience. Much of our travel is conditioned: 'God willing, and weather permitting.'"

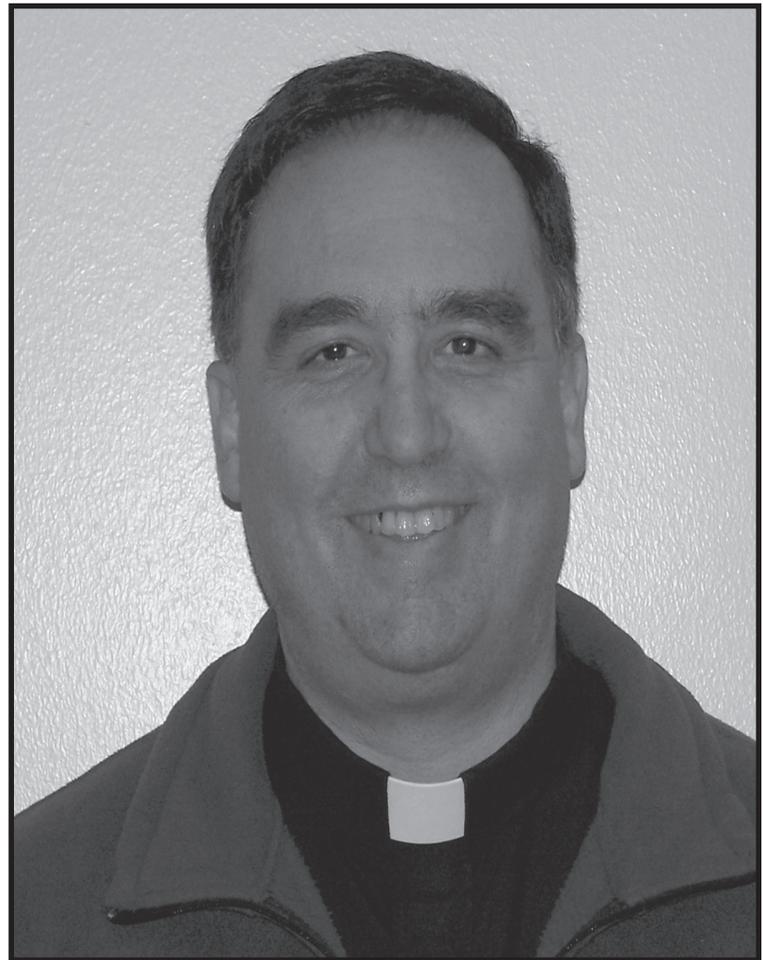
Father Hemmer, unquestionably, did a great deal of traveling and great amount of manual labor improving and maintaining buildings. That, however, was not his primary purpose for coming to and staying on in Alaska. In his own words: "I did not come north simply to survive the rigors of travel and to attend to material church-related needs, no matter how important. Nor did I come north simply to learn patience. I came north in response to a challenging call to mission, in the best Franciscan tradition." He saw himself "as one engaged in what was essentially a spiritual enterprise, as one called and sent by the Lord Himself."

As of the year 2010, Father Hemmer was still pastor of Kaltag-Ruby.

#### **FATHER ROSS A. TOZZI**

Ross Anthony Tozzi was born to Ezio, a sergeant in the U.S. Army at the time, and Domenica Tozzi on November 24, 1960, in Munich, Germany. As a boy, with his parents and three brothers, he traveled the world, living successively in Germany, Japan, North Carolina, New York, and Maryland. He was schooled in a variety of different institutions. In 1982, he graduated from Loyola College in Baltimore with a B.A. degree in accounting. After graduating with an M.B.A. from the Owen Graduate School of Management at Nashville's Vanderbilt University in 1984, he joined the U.S. Army. For five years, he served as a finance officer: at Burtonwood, England; at Fort Sill, Oklahoma; and at Fort Harrison, Indiana.

In 1989, Ross left the military. That same year, his life's journey took him north. He joined the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. As a member of the Corps, he was assigned to serve



for a year on the staff that operated Radio KNOM in Nome, Alaska. However, not knowing, by his own admission, how to say "no," he wound up serving at KNOM for three years. During those three years, he also worked for the Nome-based Northwest Campus of the University of Alaska as its business manager.

Blessed with a generous, volunteering heart, Ross next volunteered his time and talents to the Franciscan Friars in charge of St. Anthony Indian Mission in Zuni, New Mexico. His offer was accepted, and he spent four years, from 1992-1996, in Zuni. During those years, he took his summer "vacations" in Nome, there helping to close out KNOM's books and to audit its finances for the Diocese of Fairbanks.

In 1989, the year he became a member of the JVC, Ross received a letter from Father Brad R. Reynolds, Vocation Director for the Oregon Province of the Society of Jesus, asking him if he would consider a call to priesthood. "I was hot under the collar," recalled Father Ross in his first homily as a priest.

***The year 2010 finds The Alaskan Shepherd celebrating 50 Years of publication! Won't you help us decorate our Shepherd Office by sending an Anniversary Card? It is our hope to display garlands of good wishes from our Shepherd friends. Please send your card to: The Alaskan Shepherd at 1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709.***

“How dare he suggest such a thing!” As Ross’s volunteer years followed one after the other, his mother, too, sensed that Ross, as did St. Paul, was “kicking against the goad.” “Many times,” Ross admitted, “my mother used to ask the same question: ‘With all your years as a volunteer, do you ever think of becoming a priest?’” But, he kept turning a deaf ear.

God, however, kept calling out to Ross, in a number of different voices, kept calling him to the priesthood. In the summer of 1993, on one of Ross’ many visits to Nome, Father Jack de Verteuil, associate pastor of St. Joseph’s parish, Nome, at the time, said to him simply, “Ross, forget about marriage; become one of us.” And two more times Ross again heard a call to priesthood. In Odenton, Maryland, at the Mass he was attending, the priest began his homily with the rhetorical question, “What is God calling you to do? Is he asking you to give up everything you have and work as a missionary?” At the Zuni mission, Ross yet again heard more or less the same question addressed to him. In the homily he gave at the Mass following the day of his ordination, he told how he answered the question and under what circumstances: “On a dark night, while two of us were driving along a treacherous back road in a blinding snowstorm, I nodded off to sleep, only to awaken suddenly with one word on my mind, ‘Yes!’” As a tear trickled down his cheek, Ross understood that he was hearing the voice of God calling him to an unconditional “Yes!”

While Ross was spending Christmas 1995 in Nome, he asked Father John A. Hinsvark, Vocation Director for the Diocese of Fairbanks, about becoming a priest for the Diocese of Fairbanks. He was handed an application form, which he filled it out and, in so doing, took the first concrete step along the road that was to lead to his being ordained a priest six years later.

In the fall of 1996, Ross began formal studies for the priesthood at Mount Angel Seminary at St. Benedict, Oregon. At the end of the academic year 1999-2000, he graduated with an M.A. degree in Sacred Theology. For his thesis topic he had chosen *The Spirituality of Therese of Lisieux*.

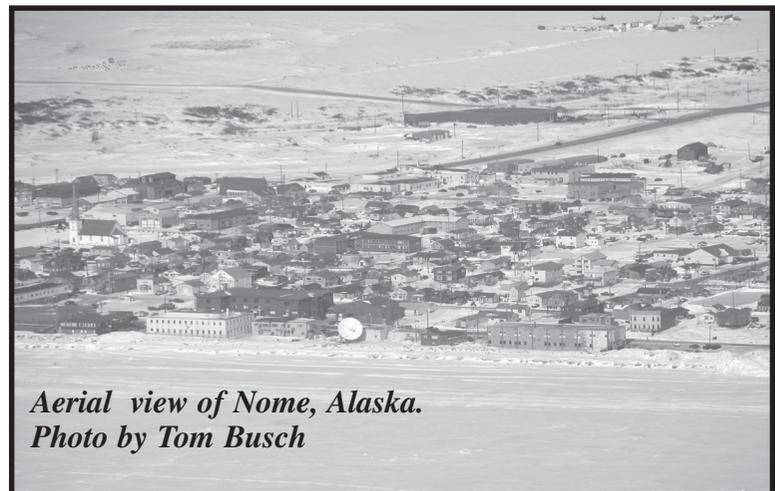
In Fairbanks, on Pentecost Sunday, June 11, 2000, Ross was ordained a transitional deacon by Michael J. Kaniecki, S.J., then Bishop of Fairbanks. As a deacon, he still had one more year of preparation before he was ready to be ordained a priest. He spent part of that year “in the field” getting practical, hands-on experience. In addition to two months in Nome, he spent some time assisting at the Downtown Chapel of St. Vincent de Paul parish in Portland, Oregon. Concerning his work there, Father Richard Berg, C.S.C., pastor, wrote: “As much as we will miss him, we’re also very pleased to send Ross on to the

priesthood. I think he will be an excellent, pastoral priest.” A staff member of the Downtown Chapel, who witnessed Deacon Ross in action with the poor, spoke of his “grace, geniality and compassion.”

For the date of his ordination to the priesthood, Deacon Ross chose July 14<sup>th</sup>, a date he considered “very special.” In the homily he gave on the day after his ordination, he listed the reasons why he considered July 14<sup>th</sup> so special. The day marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of KNOM’s going on the air. It was on July 14, 1947, that Father Bellarmine Lafortune, S.J., missionary for over 40 years to the people of Nome and to the Eskimos of the surrounding area and of King Island, collapsed at the altar in the old St. Joseph’s Church while offering Mass. And July 14<sup>th</sup> is also the feast day of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, Native American and patroness of ministries to Native Americans. So, it was on July 14, 2001, in the new St. Joseph’s Church in Nome, that Ross A. Tozzi was ordained to the priesthood, for the Diocese of Fairbanks, by Francis T. Hurley, retired Archbishop of Anchorage. That ordination was an historic event. It was the first time ever that a man was ordained a Catholic priest in Nome.

Father Tozzi’s first assignment as a priest was that of associate pastor to Father Patrick D. Bergquist, pastor of St. Raphael’s parish, Fairbanks. As such, he served also occasionally as visiting priest to St. Patrick’s parish in Barrow. In 2002, Father Tozzi was named pastor of St. Nicholas parish in North Pole. In May 2009, Bishop Kettler assigned Father Tozzi to serve as pastor of St. Joseph, Nome; St. Francis Xavier, Kotzebue; St. Ann, Teller; and St. Jude, Little Diomed.

—Still more NORTHERN ALASKAN PRIESTS to follow.



*Aerial view of Nome, Alaska.  
Photo by Tom Busch*

***“We are blessed to have so many supporters who make our work possible. I want to especially thank those of you who remember us in your prayers. Donations provide tangible benefits, but the power of prayer and the Lord’s grace is our bedrock. Thank you with all our hearts.”***  
***--Bishop Donald J. Kettler***