



# The Alaskan Shepherd



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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 III

**Editor's Note:** *Here it is, the third part in our series featuring our Alaskan priests. As I read through the writings of Fr. Louis L. Renner, S.J., and, hesitatingly, edited, for the sake of space, his detailed accounts of Jesuits in Alaska, I realized that the story of their presence in Alaska would not be complete without a brief history of how the Alaska Mission came to be. Accordingly, I offer you here, by way of a kind of prologue to the biographical sketches of the other four Jesuits presently serving in the Diocese of Fairbanks (Fr. Normand A. Pepin was featured in Part I), "The Evolvement of Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction in Alaska."*

—Patty Walter

Alaska, (spelled variously during earlier times) is the name the Native inhabitants of the Aleutian Islands, the Aleuts, gave to the land mass lying to the east of their ancestral homeland. It translates basically as "the Great Land." Comprising 591,004 square miles, this massive peninsula at the northwestern extremity of the North American continent is nearly one-fifth the size of the

continental states. Organized as a Territory in 1912, Alaska was admitted into the Union in 1959 as the forty-ninth state.

According to reliable records, the first formal act of Christian worship in what is today the State of Alaska took place on Ascension Day, May 13, 1779, when the Franciscan priest, Father Juan Riobó, a member of a Spanish exploratory expedition sailing out of San Blas, Mexico, celebrated Mass near present-day Craig in Southeastern Alaska. Alaska remained, in terms of Roman Catholic ecclesiastical jurisdiction, a "no-man's land" until 1847, when Modeste Demers was consecrated the first bishop of Vancouver Island, Canada, and given jurisdiction "over the island of that name and all British and Russian possessions as far north as 'the glacial sea.'" The first Catholic missionary priest to enter Alaska was a member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Father Jean Séguin, who, coming from Canada, spent a winter, 1862-63, at Fort Yukon.

While Oblate missionaries were active in northern Alaska, diocesan priests from Vancouver Island were visiting Alaska's Southeast in hopes of establishing missions. In May 1879, Bishop Charles J. Seghers founded a mission at Wrangell and put Father John J. Althoff in charge. In 1885, Seghers, now an archbishop, established a mission at Sitka with Father William L. Heynen in charge.

In 1886, Seghers, rightly honored as "the Apostle of Alaska," set out for Alaska on what was to be the last journey of his life. He had with him two Jesuit priests, Fathers Paschal Tosi and Aloysius J. Robaut. The party had as its goal the establishment of missions in Alaska's northern interior, especially at Nulato, which Seghers fondly remembered from his earlier stay there.

The archbishop, the two Jesuits, and a Catholic layman, Francis Fuller, left Victoria on July 13, 1886. On September 7, via the Chilkoot Trail, they arrived at the



*This photo was taken in November 2009, on the occasion of a casual dinner gathering in Bishop Donald J. Kettler's home. 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*

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confluence of the Stewart and Yukon Rivers, still in Canada. It was decided that the two Jesuits would spend the winter there, while Seghers and Fuller would push on downriver toward Nulato. It was getting late in the season for river travel, but Seghers was most eager to get to Nulato, driven, as he was, by the fear that Protestant ministers might arrive before he did and take over the area.

As Seghers and Fuller, who had already given clear signs of mental instability soon after the party left tidewater, made their way down the Yukon, their boat, traveling conditions, and Fuller's mind deteriorated rapidly. On October 4, they arrived at the confluence of the Yukon and Tanana Rivers, where they abandoned their boat and waited for the river to freeze solid enough for sled travel. On November 19, they again set out for Nulato. On November 27, with Nulato still a good distance away and travel difficult because of deep snow, the party camped. Early the next morning, the demented Fuller fired a shot into Seghers as he bent over to pick up his mittens. He died instantly.

The following spring, 1887, Fathers Tosi and Robaut came down the Yukon into Alaska, where they learned of Seghers' death. Immediately Father Tosi sailed for the Pacific Northwest to confer with the Rocky Mountain Mission Superior, Father Joseph M. Cataldo, S.J. When Seghers was given Fathers Tosi and Robaut for the trip north in 1886, they were intended simply as traveling companions. There was no intention to commit Jesuits to the Alaska Mission. Divine Providence ordained otherwise. Upon Father Tosi's urging, Father Cataldo decided then and there that the Jesuits would, for the time being, take charge at least of parts of Alaska. A long-term commitment would need Rome's approval. Armed with all the faculties the Vicar General of Vancouver Island could give him, Father Tosi returned to Alaska in the summer of 1887 to organize the systematic development of missions in northern Alaska. In 1892, during a private visit with Pope Leo XIII in Rome, Father Tosi so moved him with his account of Alaska that he told Father Tosi: "Go, and make yourself the pope in those regions!"

Formal ecclesiastical jurisdiction within the whole of Alaska first came about in 1894, when the Holy See separated Alaska from the Diocese of Vancouver Island and made it a Prefecture Apostolic with Father Tosi as Prefect Apostolic. At the same time, Alaska became an independent mission, entrusted to the Jesuits, with Father Tosi as General Superior. Failing health led to his being replaced as Prefect Apostolic in 1897 by Father John B. René, S.J. He, in turn, was replaced, in 1904, by Father Joseph R. Crimont, S.J. In 1916, Alaska was raised to the next ecclesiastical level, that of a Vicariate Apostolic, and, the following year, Father Crimont was consecrated a bishop to serve as Alaska's first Vicar Apostolic. (It was Bishop Crimont, who, in 1920, five years before she was declared a saint, placed the whole Alaska Mission under the protection of St. Therese of Lisieux.) Upon his death in 1945, he was succeeded by his coadjutor, since 1939, Bishop Walter J. Fitzgerald, S.J., who died two years later. He was followed in 1948 by Francis D. Gleeson, S.J., Alaska's last Vicar Apostolic. Bishop Gleeson retired in November 1968, and was succeeded as Bishop of Fairbanks by Robert L. Whelan, S.J. (Although Bishop George T. Boileau, S.J., never exercised ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Alaska, his name should be mentioned here. He was consecrated Coadjutor Bishop to Gleeson with right of succession on July 31, 1964, and died February 25, 1965.) When, in 1985, Bishop Whelan retired as Ordinary of Fairbanks, Michael J. Kaniecki, S.J., ordained a bishop on May 1st of the previous year as his Coadjutor, began his 15-year term as Ordinary of Fairbanks. In the Eskimo village of Emmonak near the mouth of the Yukon River, on August 6, 2000, Bishop Kaniecki died suddenly of a massive heart attack, leaving the Fairbanks diocese without a bishop until August 22, 2002, when Donald J. Kettler, the first Diocesan priest, was ordained and installed as Bishop of Fairbanks.

## CHARLES J. PETERSON, S.J.

Charles Jon "Chuck" Peterson was born the younger of two boys to Gustave F. Peterson, Jr., and Margaret Leppert Peterson in Missoula, Montana, on November 26, 1938. There he attended St. Francis Xavier Grade School and Loyola High School, graduating as salutatorian from the latter in 1956. "Drawn to the Jesuit vocation by the example of all the Jesuits staffing the St. Francis Xavier parish-school complex, and attracted to the priesthood by his many years of serving Mass as an acolyte," in his words, he entered the Jesuit novitiate at Sheridan, Oregon, on August 15, 1956. Two years later, having "enjoyed the two years of novitiate formation," he took the simple vows constituting him a Jesuit. He spent two additional years at Sheridan studying the classics and humanities. He did so well in Latin and Greek that he was asked to specialize in those two languages.

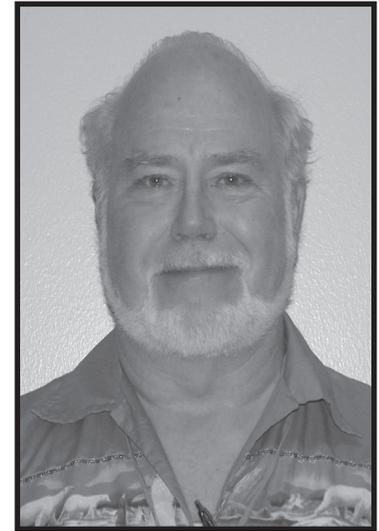
In June 1960, Chuck went to West Baden, Indiana, for three years of philosophical studies. By his own admission, he was "a mediocre philosopher, passed everything, but excelled in nothing." Meanwhile, he worked toward a degree in the Classics at Loyola University, Chicago.

Near the end of his elementary schooling, Chuck attended a lecture and saw films about Alaska presented by Father Bernard R. Hubbard, S.J. This aroused in him a desire to serve one day as a flying missionary priest in Alaska, a desire that never left him. Throughout his high school years, he was fascinated by airplanes and flying. He built and flew many model airplanes. In 1955, he joined the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Corps and won a flight scholarship. However, his hopes of one day being a flying missionary in Alaska came to an abrupt end. When he was about to solo, his ophthalmologist denied him medical clearance for a general pilot's license. Chuck's eyesight was not adequate enough. Though now resigned not to be doing his own flying in Alaska, his desire to serve as a priest in Alaska never diminished.

It was a happy Chuck Peterson who found himself at Copper Valley School during the summer of 1963 ready to begin a two-year stint there as a teacher of Latin, English, and Religion, as well as to serve as prefect of the younger boys and moderator of the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Corps. Recalling his CVS days years later, he remembered as highlights the March 27, 1964, earthquake; his tour around Alaska in the early summer of 1964; and the ordination of Father George T. Boileau, S.J., to the rank of bishop on July 31st of that memorable year.

After spending the summer of 1965 at the University of San Francisco completing course work for his Master's degree in the Classics, Chuck went on to teach Latin and Greek at Gonzaga Preparatory in Spokane, Washington, for a year. During that year, he was occupied also as line coach of the junior varsity football team, and coach of the speech and debate teams.

After the workload he had had at CVS, he found that "G-Prep was a cakewalk." In August 1966, Chuck arrived in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, to begin four years of theological studies at Regis College. On June 1, 1969, in St. Anthony's Church in his native city of Missoula he was ordained a priest. A week later, he celebrated his first Solemn High Mass in the church of his childhood, St. Francis Xavier's.



His theological studies completed, Father Peterson was, initially, intended by his Superiors to spend the year 1970-71 teaching at Monroe Catholic High School in Fairbanks. However, upon the urging of Father John J. Morris, S.J., the first priest to push seriously, in the late 1960s, for an Alaska Native permanent diaconate program, he was assigned, instead, to Bethel, to help further such a program. Though serving as co-pastor of the Bethel parish and of its two dependent missions, Marshall and Russian Mission, through an all-out effort, Father Peterson was, nevertheless, able to make of the incipient permanent diaconate program a full-fledged reality. While the “push” to inaugurate such a program came from Father Morris originally, it was Father Peterson who brought that “total dedication,” in the words of Father Morris, to the program that, in short order, developed into the Eskimo Deacon Program. On February 8, 1975, he was present in Marshall to concelebrate at the Mass at which Alvin F. Owletuk of Marshall was ordained to the permanent diaconate. This was the first of many ordinations of a Central Yup’ik Eskimo to the permanent diaconate.

Father Peterson made his tertianship in India during the year 1973-74. During his return trip, while stopping off in Rome, he heard rumors that he might be asked to start a program for the training of Alaska Natives for the priesthood. Upon his arrival in Fairbanks, in August 1974, he learned that that was, indeed, his next assignment. For two years, while serving as Vocation Director for the Diocese of Fairbanks and as chaplain to Catholic students at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, he held training workshops for Yup’ik Eskimo deacon candidates, doing most of the teaching himself. In Yup’ik villages, he conducted weekend retreats for young adults to awaken the communities to the need for indigenous ministry in general and for indigenous priestly ministry in particular.

In the fall of 1976, the General Superior of Jesuits in Alaska, ordered Father Peterson to have a seminary for candidates for the priesthood “up and running” by the following year. From October 1976 to April 1977, Father Peterson spent time at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, and at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, California, seeking advice and help to staff the seminary in question. No staff help was forthcoming. In May, he returned to Fairbanks, where two Central Yup’ik Eskimo candidates were waiting to begin seminary training for the priesthood. A third entered the seminary later, but, by then, the first two had left. The seminary venture, while up, did not run for long. It ended in late 1978. The candidates found life away from their Native environment just too difficult.

From January 1978 to June 1979, Father Peterson, unexpectedly, found himself pastor of Hooper Bay and Scammon Bay. During that year, he came to see yet more clearly that, in his words, “Native ministry training must take place in the social context of the candidates and of the people whom they serve.” The validity of this observation was, at the very time, being concretely underscored by the very successful Eskimo Deacon Program.

From August 1979 through May 1980, Father Peterson again conducted retreats for young adults in villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

On May 19, 1980, Father Peterson’s father died suddenly. His mother had died on December 10, 1977. He took time off; went to Portland, Oregon, to work through some grieving and to deal with a serious high blood pressure problem. While in Portland, he developed a program of workshops to be held in several villages for the purpose of helping Alaska Natives to deepen their theological and ministerial skills. When he was back in Alaska, along with continuing to give retreats for young adults, he conducted a series of theological and spirituality workshops during the years 1981-83. All this he did under the title of “Director of the Center of Theology and Spirituality,” a name derived from the

“seminary experiment.” As director of CTS he was headquartered in Fairbanks. He then spent a sabbatical year, 1983-84, at Regis College, where he had made his theology, to “gain more skills in the enculturation directions of the program.” His sabbatical ended with a pilgrimage trip to the Holy Land and Spain.

Upon his return to Alaska, Father Peterson found his world “turned upside down.” By this time, owing to the settlement in 1976 of the Molly Hootch case which mandated high schools in even relatively small Alaskan villages, high schools had sprung up all over northwestern Alaska, with the result that St. Mary’s Mission Boarding School on the Andreafsky River was no longer getting the kind of well qualified applicants, nor in sufficient numbers, that had helped to make it such an academic success up to the early 1980s. A student body of diminishing numbers composed of less carefully screened applicants plagued the school with serious problems. “The viability of St. Mary’s was being sorely tested,” in the words of Father Peterson. Michael J. Kaniecki, S.J., Bishop of Fairbanks as of July 28, 1985, put pressure on Father James A. Sebesta, S.J., General Superior of Jesuits in Alaska, to “save the school or close it.” Father Peterson was assigned that awesome responsibility. Concerning it, he wrote, “From years of ministry training work to a job as a high school administrator was a big leap into the unknown for me.” However, he accepted the challenge.

In 1985, Father Peterson became administrator of St. Mary’s. During his first year in that position, along with having on hand a student body far from ideal, he had to contend also with a mutinous group of Jesuit Volunteer Corps members, who went so far as to seek his dismissal from the school. However, he survived that first year, and saw to it that this group was replaced with a well prepared new group. From the outset of his tenure at St. Mary’s, in addition to running the school, he also conducted an extensive survey of former students and graduates—interviewing, by actual count, 613—to determine whether or not the school could and should stay open. On the basis of Father Peterson’s findings, Bishop Kaniecki determined that the school should be closed. The May 1987 graduation was St. Mary’s last. By his own admission, the years 1985-1987, were, as of December 2003, “the toughest apostolic years” of Father Peterson’s life.

From August 1987 to August 1989, again unexpectedly, Father Peterson found himself pastor of St. Joseph’s parish in Nome. As such, he had the care also of its dependent stations: Little Diomed Island, Teller, and Unalakleet. The formation of Native deacons and the training Native lay ministers that had, all along, been his primary apostolic interests, were now—but only for a time—in other hands.

In August 1990, Father Peterson was mandated by Bishop Kaniecki to start the Native Ministry Training Program at St. Mary’s Mission. He was “delighted” to help again to train Native lay ministers. He headed the program until 1997.

During those seven years, too, in keeping with the wishes of Bishop Kaniecki, Father Peterson started and produced a radio program called “The Lord Be With You!” The program was designed to give spiritual and scriptural inspiration to Native deacons and lay ministers throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and to help them with the preparation of their homilies and instructions. The program first went on the air on October 15, 1990. Over the years, and up to 2004, it was broadcast four times a week over KNOM, the Catholic radio station in Nome. During Father Peterson’s seven years with the program, over 700 shows were produced and aired.

The years 1990-97 were good years for Father Peterson. He was happy to be doing the apostolic work of his preference, work that he had undertaken when he first went to Alaska as a young priest in 1970. With the year 1997, his years of fruitful ministry in Alaska was

**FAIRBANKS/NORTH POLE  
ROAD PARISHES**

**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

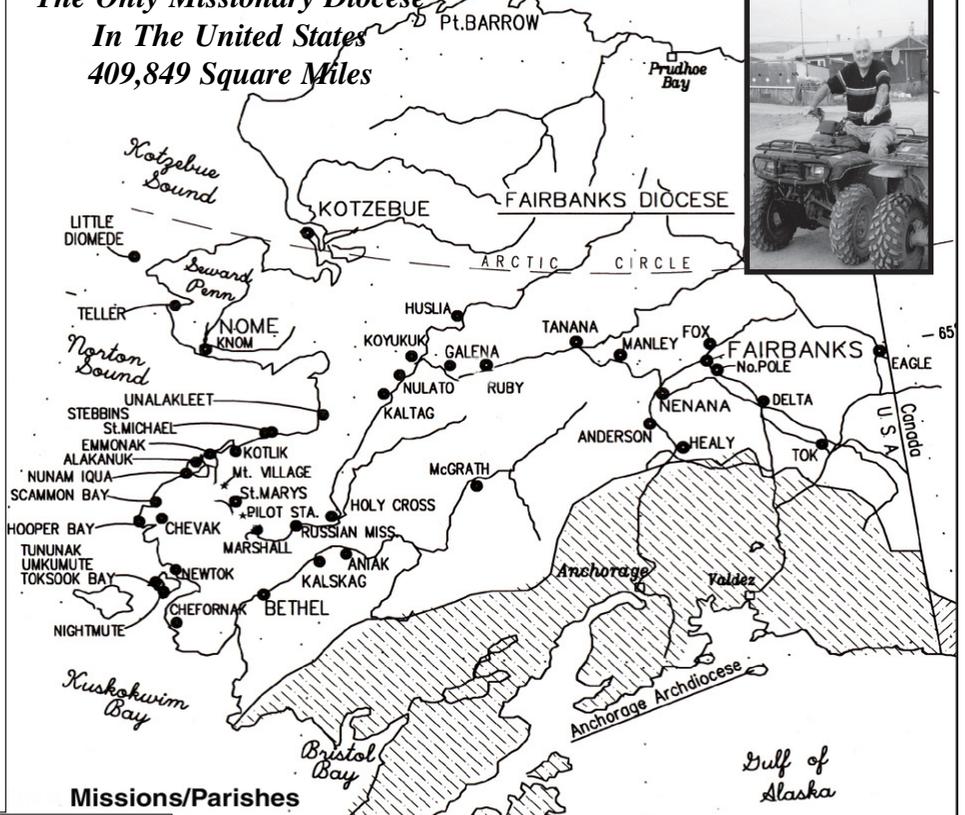


**Father Jack de Verteuil**  
Healy/Nenana /Denali Park/  
Clear AFB



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

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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  
Cheforak /Tununak/Toksook Bay/Nelson Island/Newtok



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



**BUSH INTERIOR PARISHES**

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

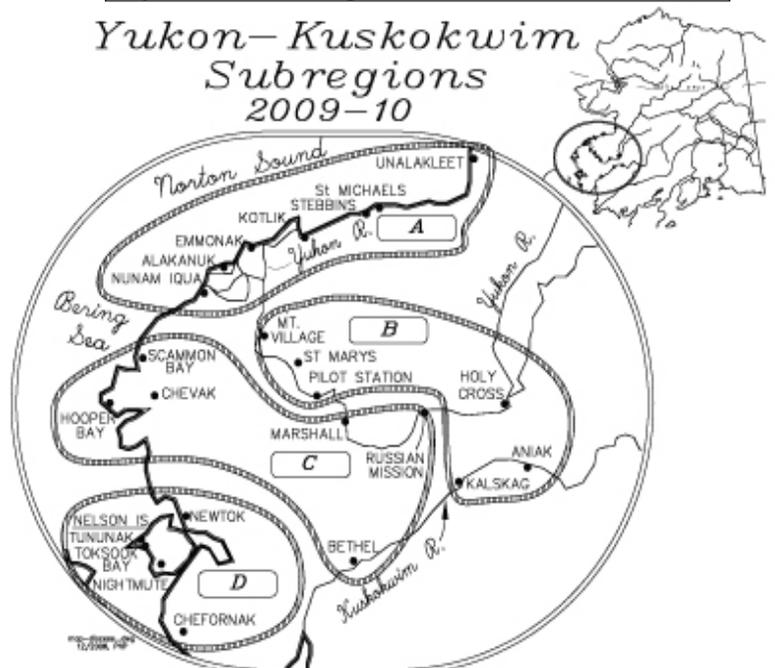


**Brother Robert J. Ruzicka, O.F.M.**  
**Brother R. Justin Huber, O.F.M.**  
\*Nulato/Galena/Koyukuk/Huslia/  
McGrath/Tanana



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

**Yukon-Kuskokwim  
Subregions  
2009-10**



**RETIRED**

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



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

put on hold. On August 15th of that year, as Director of the Rocky Mountain Mission, he began to serve the Indian people of the Pacific Northwest. During his first six years in that position, he made Omak, Washington, his headquarters. In December 2003, while still retaining the directorship of the Rocky Mountain Mission, he moved into the Jesuit House Residence at Gonzaga University. In 2005, Father Peterson was “called back” to Alaska to provide sacramental support to Catholics in Bethel and surrounding villages. At Bishop Donald Kettler’s request, he now serves as pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish, in Bethel, Immaculate Heart of Mary in Marshall, and Our Lady of Guadalupe in Russian Mission. Father Peterson serves too as a consultant on Bishop Kettler’s Presbyteral Council.

Looking back on his over 50 years as a Jesuit, Father Peterson reflected: *“The ministries and apostolic missions I felt called to were not necessarily the ones I was assigned to. The Latin and Greek studies I was assigned to were the last I felt called to. My assignment to teach at Gonzaga Prep was a total surprise. My assignment to start a seminary in Alaska seemed an impossible one to me. My being assigned as pastor to Hooper Bay and Scammon Bay puzzled me. My assignment to administer St. Mary’s High School was a bolt out of the blue. My being appointed pastor of Nome was a surprise. Yet, in all those assignments, I found a spiritual energy that complemented the assignments. In the final analysis, they were all in tune with my own aspirations. I had a chance to put into practice the obedience I had vowed all those years.”*

**THEODORE E. KESTLER, S.J.**

Theodore E. “Ted” Kestler was born in Tacoma, Washington, on December 18, 1943, along with his twin sister, Mary Ann. In Tacoma, he attended Franklin Public Grade School and, as a member of St. Leo’s parish, St. Leo’s Parochial School. After his father died in 1955, the family moved to Spanaway, a small town a little south of Tacoma, to live on a farm next to his uncle and aunt. Ted graduated from Clover Creek Elementary School in 1958, and from Bethel Senior High School in 1962. He then went on to attend Central Washington State College in Ellensburg, and Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington.

On September 7, 1964, Ted entered the Jesuit Novitiate at Sheridan, Oregon. After completing his two-year noviceship, he spent the years 1966-69 at Mount St. Michael’s, Spokane, studying the classics and humanities, and philosophy. From 1969-72, he taught geometry and mathematics at Gonzaga Preparatory in Spokane. By the time he finished his three years of teaching, he had earned a B.A. in classical studies and a B.S. in chemistry from Gonzaga University, and an M.A. in mathematics from Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. He found his three years of teaching at Gonzaga Preparatory so satisfying that, at the end of them, he hoped to return to secondary education after completing his theological studies and being ordained a priest.

Ted made his theological studies at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, California, during the years in 1972-75. He ended them with a Master of Divinity degree in Theology. In Spokane, on June 14, 1975, he was ordained a priest.

In the course of his theological studies, Father Kestler became vitally interested in Sacred Scripture in general and in “the historical Jesus question” in particular. He took all the courses offered in Scripture, and began a life-long habit of keeping up to date on matters related to Scripture and theology by reading the latest publications in those fields. This reading habit laid the foundation of his personal spiritual life. At the same time, it made him the much-in-demand lecturer, spiritual director, and retreat master that he eventually became. In addition to being highly respected for his expertise in the areas of Scripture and theology, he, quite early on, became a recognized

authority also on the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. Father Kestler’s first assignment as a priest was to Bellarmine Preparatory in Tacoma, where, from 1975-80, he taught in the mathematics and theology departments. From 1980-81, he made his tertianship in Spokane. It was during his tertianship year that his “interest in Alaska was sparked.”

Father Kestler left an account of how he first happened to go to Alaska: *“As part of the program, each tertian had to undergo an apostolic experiment in an area he was not familiar with. One day I came down to breakfast, and there was a map of Alaska on the refrigerator with a note that Bishop Whelan needed a priest in Alakanuk. My first response was, ‘It’s cold there! It’s not for me!’ But then I bumped into Father Jake Morton, who had done his regency [teaching as a seminarian] in Alaska. I told him about the need for a priest in some village in Alaska, and that I had considered going. In his gentle manner, he told me, ‘You should go there. The people are wonderful, and you will get a sense of a different culture.’ I thought it over, and decided to volunteer. I went into the tertian instructor’s office that evening to say that I would volunteer—only to learn that two others had beaten me to it. The next day, however, I was informed that Bishop Whelan could use all three of us. I was chosen for Kaltag. That was in early October, 1980.”*

While at Kaltag, Father Kestler met Father Louis L. Renner, S.J., who had come there to help lay in a winter’s supply of stove wood. Together the four sawed, split, and stacked wood. All in all, Father Kestler found that, and the whole of his Kaltag stay, a rather agreeable experience, so much so that, after some prayer, he asked Father Thomas R. Royce, S.J., Provincial of the Oregon Province at the time, to be sent to serve on the Alaska missions. Father Royce, however, thinking that Father Kestler was acting merely out of initial enthusiasm, assigned him to Gonzaga Preparatory, telling him that if, after a few years, he still wanted to serve in Alaska, he, Father Royce, would consider it. While teaching at Gonzaga, Father Kestler, whenever he saw Father Royce, told him that his desire to return to Alaska remained strong.

After taking his final vows, on September 7, 1982, Father Kestler found himself, happily, assigned to Alaska. Attractive as Kaltag was to him, he had little hope of being stationed there. Great, then, and very pleasant, was his surprise, when he received a letter from Michael J. Kaniecki, S.J., General Superior of Jesuits in Alaska at the time, informing him that he was to be pastor of the Kaltag-Nulato missions. For a little over three years, from 1982-85, he divided his time, more or less equally, between the two villages, commuting between them by

boat, when the Yukon River was open, and by snowmachine, when it was paved over with ice and snow. Contrary to what some of his classmates anticipated, he, in his own words, “loved every moment of it.”

But, it was an assignment too good to last. Father Kestler now had to pay a price for being the acknowledged Scripture scholar, theologian, spiritual director, and specialist in the Jesuit Constitutions and in Ignatian spirituality that he was. As of August 15, 1985, he was



appointed Rector and President of St. Michael's Institute, a philosophate affiliated with and on the campus of Gonzaga University. All the while, however, his desire to return to Alaska continued undiminished.

Again, a big and pleasant surprise awaited him. A year before he was to leave his Spokane assignment, his Provincial informed him that his name was on the list of candidates for the post of General Superior of Jesuits in Alaska. He was chosen, and, for nine years, beginning on July 31, 1990, served as such. From November 6-18, 1991, he was in Rome to attend "Superior School" for Father Provincials and Regional Superiors. For the first several years as General Superior, he made his headquarters in Fairbanks, out of which he traveled far and wide to visit his fellow Jesuits in the places of their ministries. Beginning in 1993, he made his headquarters at St. Mary's Mission, on the Andreafsky River. Out of there, he continued his visitations, but he also began serving as the director of the tertianship he had established at St. Mary's. The number of tertians began and remained low. Being their director, nevertheless, made further demands on him.

From January 5 to March 22, 1995, Father Kestler was again in Rome, this time as one of two elected delegates to the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. On October 1, 1997, he became Superior also of the St. Mary's Jesuit community. This consisted of around ten priests serving in western Alaska. In addition to serving now as a Superior on two levels, he was also a pastoral minister and an instructor in the Native Ministry Training Program.

The NMTP was, from its inception in 1990, a program very dear Father Kestler's heart. He was a firm and vocal believer that Alaska's Native people, in this case the Central Yup'ik Eskimo, can be and must become, by design of Divine Providence, ever more truly Catholic, while, at the same time, remaining ever more truly Yup'ik. The more they are the one, the more they are the other, he reasoned. "I am profoundly convinced," he wrote, "that 'seeds of the word,' as the early Church Fathers and the Second Vatican referred to them, were already present in the life and customs of all indigenous peoples before missionaries actually arrived."

As time went on, it became more and more clear to Father Kestler that, because of falling numbers in Jesuit personnel, Alaska was never going to become an independent Province, and that its juridical structure needed evaluation. After prayer and consultation, and on-going discussions with the then Provincial, Father Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J., both he and Father Sundborg thought the time had come for them to ask the Father General in Rome to suppress the Dependent Region of Alaska and make its personnel directly a part of the Oregon Province. On July 31, 1999, the Feast of St. Ignatius, at the end of the 8-day retreat made by the Alaskan Jesuits at Holy Spirit Center, Anchorage, Alaska, the official Decree of Suppression was read. With that reading, the Dependent Region of Alaska ceased to be, and Father Kestler's terms, both as General Superior and local Superior, came to an end. He continued, however, to reside at St. Mary's Mission, and to serve as tertian director, as an instructor in the Native Ministry



*St Mary's Mission  
St. Marys, Alaska*

Training Program, as visiting priest to the St. Marys parish, and as "sacramental priest" to Pilot Station and Mountain Village.

In the course of his years in Alaska, Father Kestler's interest in Scripture and theology continued unabated. The same can be said for his interest in giving spiritual direction and doing retreat work. More than once, he directed his fellow Alaskan Jesuits, as a group and as individuals, during their annual retreats. In October 1994, he led the priests of the Diocese of Boise in two separate, week-long retreats. About 60 priests participated in the retreats. Among other virtues, he stressed the virtue of hope, a key virtue in his personal spiritual life.

As of the year 2010, Father Kestler was still stationed at St. Marys, serving as pastoral minister to St. Marys' Church of the Nativity parish, as sacramental minister to Pilot Station and Mountain Village, and as a staff member of the Native Ministry Training Program. Father Kestler was the last General Superior of the Jesuits in Alaska, and they never had a finer one.

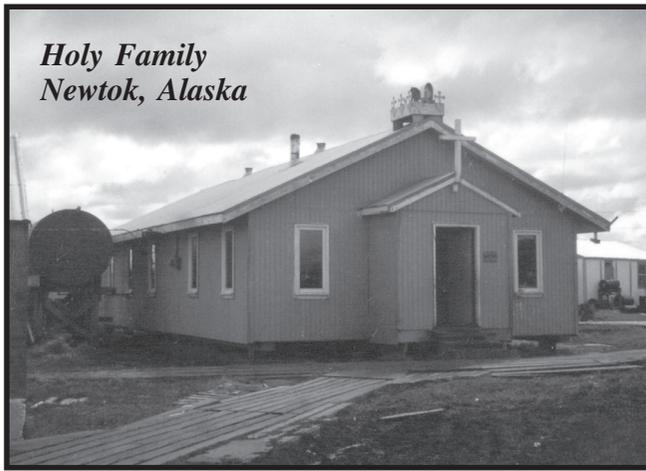
**FATHER THOMAS G.  
PROVINSAL, S.J.**

Thomas Gene "Tom" Provinsal—the second of 14 children—was born to John and Mable Bissonette Provinsal in Wendell, Idaho, on September 15, 1944. His parents farmed near Black Diamond, Idaho. Tom began the first grade at St. Joseph's Catholic School in Pocatello, Idaho, in 1950. Because of his father's allergy to dust, the family moved off the farm, and kept moving from place to place, with the result that Tom



***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..."***

wound up attending nine different grade schools. He lived in Seattle from 1951 through 1956. For the first year and a half of his high schooling, 1958-60, he attended Bishop White Seminary in Spokane, Washington, then Gonzaga Preparatory, Spokane, from which he graduated in 1962. After attending Gonzaga University for a year, he entered the Jesuit Novitiate of St. Francis Xavier, the novitiate of the Oregon Province, at Sheridan, Oregon, on September 7, 1963. He took his first vows on September 8, 1965, after which he spent an additional year at Sheridan studying the classics and humanities.



*Holy Family  
Newtok, Alaska*

During the summer of 1966, Tom moved to Mount St. Michael's, on the outskirts of Spokane, to continue his studies of the humanities and to make his philosophical studies. He majored in English and earned a degree in that field. While at Mount St. Michael's, being poetically and artistically gifted and inclined, he directed the play *Becket*.

Tom saw Alaska for the first time in the summer of 1968, when he and Rory Miller of the California Province went there to teach catechism, under the direction of Father Paul B. Mueller, S.J., at Mountain Village, Pilot Station, Marshall, and Russian Mission. The two spent a few days also at St. Mary's Mission on the Andreafsky River, the gateway to the above villages. When Tom first saw Alaska, he was, in his own words, "fascinated by the vastness of the land." That fascination with Alaska's great wilderness was never to leave him.

In the summer of 1969, having completed his philosophical studies, Tom returned to Alaska. There he spent two years at Copper Valley School as a teacher of English, Speech, and Latin, and as "Boys' Dorm Prefect." During the summers of 1970 and '71, he attended the University of Alaska-Fairbanks earning his teaching credentials. During the year 1971-72, Tom was at Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon, as a teacher of English. In 1972, he began his theological studies at Regis College in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He was ordained a priest on June 14, 1975.

Shortly after his ordination, Father Provinsal, more commonly known as "Father Tom," went to Bethel, Alaska. By special arrangement with his Superiors, he was to spend two years there studying the Central Yup'ik Eskimo language at the Bethel Community College, a branch of the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, and then to return to Toronto for his fourth year of theology. After being in Bethel for six months, he was sent to serve the people of Newtok, and directed to learn the Yu'pik language. In 1977, Father Tom, having by then acquired a fairly good speaking knowledge of Eskimo, returned to Toronto to finish his theology. After that, he spent five and a half months in Spokane making his tertianship.

Father Tom returned to Alaska in January 1979. From 1979-86, he had the pastoral care of the villages of Chevak and Newtok. He commuted between the two "by snowmachine directly in winter, 50

miles; and, at other times, by plane through Bethel, a 220-mile horseshoe." Often he had to overnight in Bethel. On April 13, 1983, he and the people of Chevak had the joy of witnessing the blessing of their new Sacred Heart Church by Robert L. Whelan, S.J., Bishop of Fairbanks at the time.

From 1986-90, Father Tom cared for the villages of Chefnak and Nightmute. During the year 1990-91, in addition to caring for Chefnak and Nightmute, he was responsible also for the villages of Newtok, Toksook Bay, and Tununak.

During his years in the Nelson Island area, Father Tom occasionally spent some time at the spring and summer fishing camp of Umkumiut. Life at Umkumiut was a good life, for young and old, for people and pastor alike. There, having left all his village cares behind, he enjoyed a life of relative leisure, was free to come and go as he pleased, free to take solitary hikes on the blooming tundra, to pray mind-wandering prayers, to relish the cozy solitude of his 12 x 16' plywood cabin warmed by driftwood burning in his oil-drum stove. An excellent photographer, Father Tom was free to take many quality photographs. He also had a natural gift for Eskimo dancing. "Eskimo dancing," he once wrote, "literally wears out the knees of my pants."

From January 1993 to the year 2002, Father Provinsal made his headquarters at Alakanuk, taking care of the pastoral needs of that village along with those of its dependent station, Nunam Iqua. In November 1995, he took on the responsibility also of Emmonak. At the same time, he assisted with the Native Ministry Training Program home-based at St. Mary's Mission. On August 6, 2000, he had the privilege of administering the Last Rites to Michael J. Kaniecki, S.J., Bishop of Fairbanks at the time, as he lay dying on the ground near Emmonak's Sacred Heart Church. A year later, at the place where Bishop Kaniecki had died, he had the consolation of concelebrating, with Francis T. Hurley, retired Archbishop of Anchorage at the time, a memorial Mass on the anniversary day of Bishop Kaniecki's death.

In early April 2003, Father Tom found himself in the Intensive Care Unit in Providence Hospital, Anchorage, with a mysterious illness that brought him close to death's door. It was never determined just what the illness was. By Easter Sunday, April 20th, however, he had improved to the point where he was able to say Mass in the Alaska Native Hospital. That was not the first time he found himself at death's door. "Father Tom's Ordeal by Blizzard," written by Father Louis L. Renner, S.J., recounts that misadventure. As of the year 2010, Father Provinsal, now home-based in St. Marys, was providing pastoral care for the villages of Chefnak, Tununak, Toksook Bay, Nelson Island, and Newtok.

**FATHER GREGG D. WOOD, S.J.**

Gregg D. Wood, the oldest of four children, was born on April 15, 1945, at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, to Gregg D. Wood, Sr., a physician/surgeon in the U.S. Army, and Jeanne L. Fortuna Wood.

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From infancy on, however, Portland, Oregon, was his home. There he grew up and received his education. From 1950-56, he attended St. Mary Magdalene Grade School. He completed his elementary education at a public school, after which he attended Jesuit High School, in Portland, from 1959-63. His collegiate studies were made at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, during the years 1963-67.

Though it was the thinking of his brothers that Gregg was the one to follow in their father's footsteps and minister to the ills

of the body, things turned out otherwise. While attending Jesuit High, in his words, he "experienced the beginning of a call to follow the Lord of Life in the Company that bears His name." He was impressed by the discipline, companionship, loyalty, and sense of purpose he witnessed in the Jesuits staffing the school. During his second year at Gonzaga, his calling to be a Jesuit priest came "to full bloom." He went on to finish his collegiate studies, ending them with an undergraduate degree in biology.

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

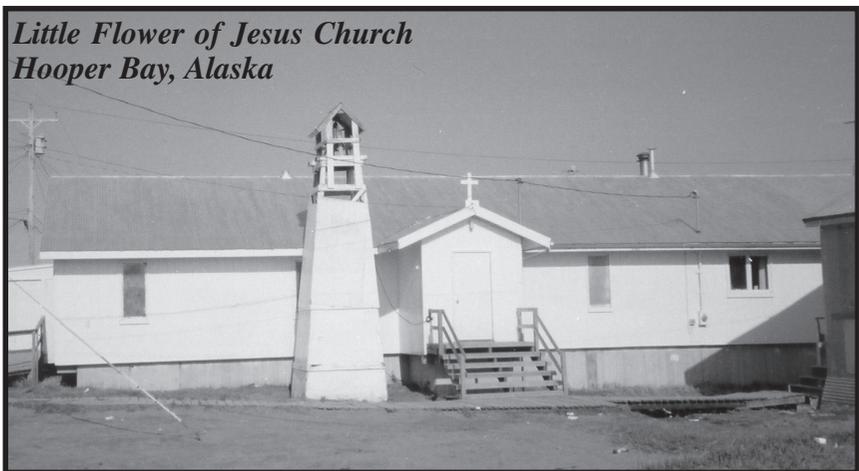
During his first year as a priest, Father Wood taught courses in Sacred Scripture and Greek at the Novitiate of St. Francis Xavier, now in Portland, Oregon. After that year, he went on to the California School of Professional Psychology in San Diego, from which he obtained a doctorate in Clinical Psychology in 1984. From 1983-95, he was stationed at Seattle University, where he served as a psychologist in the Counseling Center. For a number of years, he was also the Father Minister of the Jesuit Community. During the year 1995-96, Father Wood was on a sabbatical, exploring the possibilities of going into ministry to Native Americans, a ministry to which he felt himself being drawn. He also felt called to lead a simpler lifestyle than that of the big city, and he wanted to be more closely connected with nature. Accordingly, he spent time on the Indian missions in eastern Washington and in Montana. For a time, too, he was a member of the Joe Prince Community, a community composed of the Jesuits ministering in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta who, on a regular basis, gathered in a building—named for Eskimo Brother Joseph Prince—at St. Mary's Mission on the Andraefsky River in western Alaska. As a member of that community, he was introduced to the Central Yup'ik Eskimos during an initial two-month visit in Hooper Bay. While there, he was shown the movie *The Alaskan Eskimo*, a movie made at Hooper Bay in 1946 by Walt Disney Productions. He recalled having seen it in a movie theater as a child.

Happy with his new-found ministry among Native Americans, in this case the Central Yup'ik Eskimos, Father Wood readily consented to replace temporarily Father Mark A. Hoelsken, S.J.—the priest then responsible for the villages of Hooper Bay, Scammon Bay, and Chevak—who was scheduled to be away during the year 1996-97 to make his tertianship in the Philippine Islands. By the time Father Hoelsken returned from the Philippines, Father Wood was so attached to the three villages he was caring for, and so into sharing the lifestyle of the people, that he asked to be allowed to continue on as their priest. As of the year 2010, he was still happily attending to those three villages, even though, after seven years on that three-village assignment, he saw fit to write to Father Louis L. Renner, S.J., "The pace here has been relentless, with so many urgent situations that just by their nature take priority."

His being a circuit rider responsible for three villages naturally made for a hectic pace and had its drawbacks. Father Wood, however, being the clinical psychologist and the Jesuit priest that he was, knew how to cope with them. When he was inclined to be discouraged, because things were not happening fast enough and in keeping with his expectations, he had recourse to prayer—"to refocus the situation, to see the big picture." He came to realize that the people to whom he was ministering were ultimately all the Lord's people, that his work was ultimately the Lord's work among them, and that it was the Lord's loving design that was being worked out in them. He humbly admitted to himself that, as a priest, he was only "the Lord's subordinate co-laborer." He found that "witnessing the Lord working in and through His people gladdens the heart."

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

—Still more NORTHERN ALASKAN PRIESTS to follow.



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***--Bishop Donald J. Kettler***