



# 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 IV FATHER MIROSLAW “MIREK” WOZNICA

On May 12, 1990, Miroslaw Woznica, “Father Mirek,” to us—and 35 classmates, were ordained Catholic priests in Christ the King Cathedral, in Katowice, Poland. His years at the Katowice Seminary and, before that, in Poland’s public schools were especially momentous given the turmoil within Poland during that time. The young Mirek Woznica grew up and studied under a mantle of constant change, albeit exciting at times.

Miroslaw Woznica was born in Rybnik, in the Silesian Voivodeship, in Southwest Poland, on August 28, 1965, to Richard and Maria Woznica. His father, currently retired, was employed as a coal miner. Silesia is a resource-rich and populous region. Bituminous and lignite coal is abundant, and a substantial manufacturing industry is present, particularly in Upper Silesia. Also mined in Silesia: copper, zinc, silver, cadmium, lead, gold, methane, iron ore, limestone, marl, marble, and basalt. At one time, uranium too was mined. Maria had her hands full watching over Mirek and big brother Zbigniew, called Zbig, but somehow managed a seamstress business. His brother and wife Iwona have two children and live in the same city and house of his birth.

Silesia is perceived by many inhabitants as a distinct region with its own culture. Most Silesians speak the national languages of their respective countries (Polish, Czech, German), although there is a recognized Silesian language, considered by some to be a dialect of Polish, with about 60,000 declared speakers in Upper Silesia. The Silesian language is Mirek’s native tongue. He speaks Polish, Russian, and English. Mirek attended primary school in Gmina Swierklany, a village of about 11,000. Mirek had a high aptitude for learning, and, as a result, spent much of his primary education teaching. His teachers often called upon him to assist teaching the younger children. Mirek greatly



*Father Miroslaw “Mirek” Woznica on the steps of Immaculate Conception Church, in Fairbanks, Alaska.*

*(All photos courtesy of Father Mirek.)*



*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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enjoyed the challenge of teaching. However, when high school did not produce the same opportunity, he grew restless.

Karol Józef Wojtyła, Bishop of Kraków, was elected Pope John Paul II, the first and only Polish Pope, on October 16, 1978, when Mirek was beginning high school.

Ten kilometers from his home village, in the city of Wodzislaw Slaski, Mirek attended public high school. Shortly after his fifteenth birthday, Mirek and his friends formed a rock band with Mirek singing lead vocals. Mirek admits that, much to his mother's dismay, he missed over 300 hours of high school due to the band's travel schedule. A gifted student, he did not suffer scholastically despite the truancy, and graduated with academic honors. While in high school, he participated in a variety of sports, including soccer and volleyball. He joined drama, participating in a number of plays; and he spent time writing both plays and music, including music for his band. Mirek remembers the time with his band as one of his happiest memories of youth and still plays music with his friends when he visits home. Mirek recalls his adolescence as a time spent actively pursuing self-growth. He remembers competing for the sake of personal accomplishment instead of for awards or recognition.

Mirek remembers the moment of his priestly calling as taking place in the course of about 45 minutes during his high school graduation ceremony. "I remember that during the service,

there was poetry and inspirational music and speeches by fellow classmates and teachers. It was very peaceful and I knew at that moment that I wanted to become a priest." Mirek first informed his girlfriend of three years and then his parents. He remembers they were very surprised at the announcement. With a twinkle in his eye he adds, "They were not nearly as surprised as my parish priest. I walked in and told him, 'where do I go to become a priest?' I think he nearly choked. You see, I was a rock star."

In 1984, at the age of 19, Mirek enrolled in the Seminary at Katowice. Poland was in the midst of great political change; and, though it was steering away from communism, the Woznica family received threats related to Mirek's enrollment at the Catholic Seminary. It was during this time that a popular Polish priest, Father Jerzy Popieluszko was murdered by agents of the internal intelligence agency. The murder caused uproar throughout Poland. Father Jerzy, a well-known charismatic priest, was first sent to strikers in the Warsaw Steelworks. He became affiliated with workers and trade unionists from the Solidarity movement who opposed the Communist regime in Poland. A staunch anti-communist, he interwove his sermons with spiritual exhortations and political messages, criticizing the Communist system and motivating people to protest. During the period of martial law in Poland (December 13, 1981 to July 22, 1983), the Catholic Church was the only force that could voice protest comparatively openly, with the regular celebration of Mass presenting opportunities for public gatherings in churches. A car accident was set up to kill Father Jerzy on October 13, 1984, but he escaped it. Consequently, the priest was kidnapped, beaten, and murdered, on October 19, 1984, by three Security Police officers. Then his body was dumped into the Vistula Water Reservoir near Wloclawek from where it was recovered on October 30, 1984. More than 250,000 people attended his funeral. Despite the murder and its repercussions, the Communist regime remained in power until 1989. Popieluszko's murderers - Captain Grzegorz Piotrowski, Leszek Pekala, Waldemar Chmielewski and Colonel Adam Petruszka — were jailed, but released later as part of an amnesty. In 1997, the Roman Catholic Church started the process of his beatification. By 2008, he had Servant of God status. On December 19, 2009, it was announced that Pope Benedict XVI had approved the decree of beatification of Father Popieluszko. He will be beatified on June 6, 2010.

Nearly ten years after Pope John Paul II's election, and barely a year before Father Mirek's ordination, on June 4, 1989, Poland experienced an overwhelming victory, when partially free elections were allowed in communist Eastern Europe. The vote paved the way for the gradual end of communist rule in the region. The changes were born of the frustration of worsening economic hardship. These frustrations led to a type of "round-table" discussion between the communist authorities in Poland and the



*Mirosław "Mirek" Woznica, pictured top left, poses for a picture with his band. The band formed while he was in high school. Mirek sang lead vocals and still gathers with its members while in Poland.*

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NOVENA IN HONOR OF

***THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS***

To the friends and benefactors of the Missionary Diocese of Fairbanks: On each of the eight days preceding the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and on the feast day itself, June 11 (2010), a novena will be offered in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and for our benefactors and their intentions. You are invited to submit petitions to be remembered during the novena. No offering is necessary. Any received will be used to support our ministries here in Northern Alaska.



You are also invited to join us on the novena days (June 3-11th) inclusive by praying the following prayer:

O Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, you said: “Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.” With confidence in your loving, compassionate Heart I come to you as the fountain of every blessing. I ask you to make my heart humble and holy like yours. Grant me to live a holy life and to die a happy death. During this novena I humbly ask also for certain spiritual and temporal favors:

\_\_\_\_\_.

**Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me!**

***Please remember the following petitions during the Novena in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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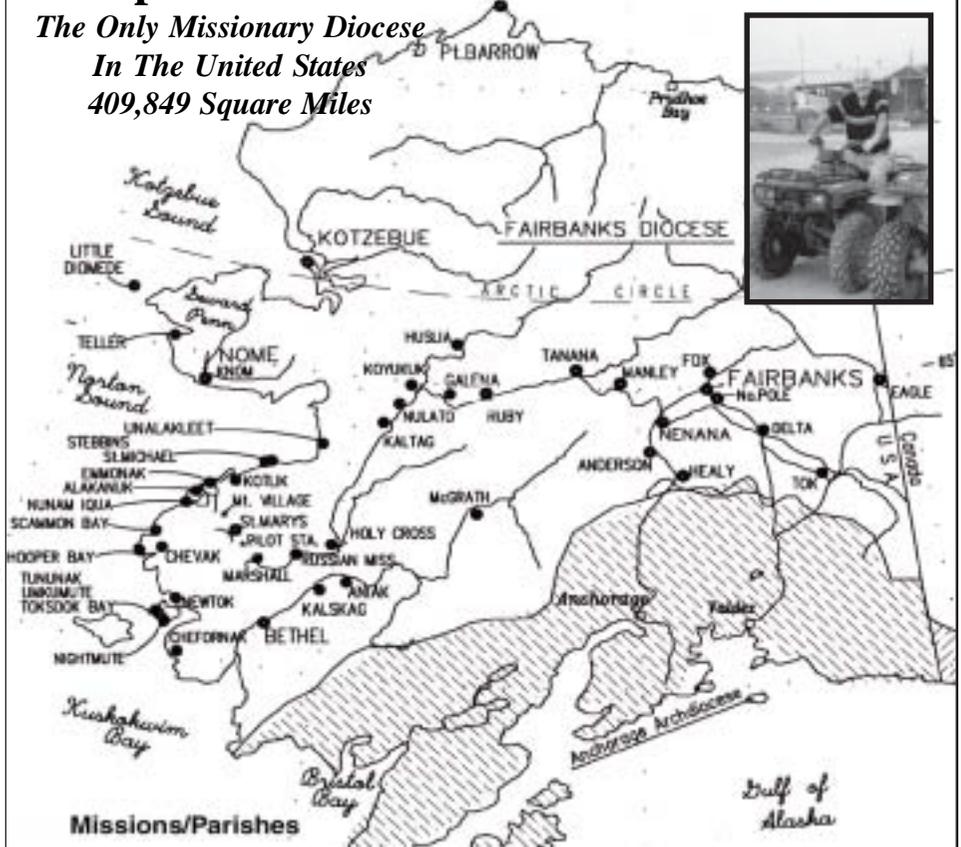
**Father Frederick C. Bayler**   
Sacred Heart Cathedral/Fairbanks  
**Father Miroslaw Woznica**   
Immaculate Conception Church/Fairbanks  
**Father Patrick D. Bergquist**   
St. Raphael Church/Fairbanks  
**Father Kasparaj Mallavarapu**  
St. Mark University Parish/  
College/Barrow  
**Father Sean P. Thomson**   
St. Mark University Parish/  
College/Prison Ministry  
**Father Robert Fath**   
St. Nicholas Church/North Pole  
Chaplain Catholic Schools

**RURAL ROAD PARISHES**

**Father John B. Martinek**   
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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**  
Chefornak /Tununak/Toksook Bay/Nelson Island/Newtok  
**Father Ross A. Tozzi**   
Nome/Kotzebue/Teller/Diomedede

**BUSH INTERIOR PARISHES**

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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**



***This photo was taken during a Seminarian trip to the Vatican. Mirek is seated in front with his roommate from the Katowice Seminary.***

Solidarity activists. The talks resulted in the communist regime's legalizing Solidarity and an agreement to hold the June 4 elections. The astounding vote resulted in Solidarity's winning 99 of the 100 Senate seats and all of the contestable 161 seats in the Sejm. In now democratic Poland, the Sejm and the Senate represent the legislative branch, the President the executive branch, and the Council of Ministers serves in much the same way as our Supreme Court, representing the judicial branch.

The Solidarity movement was the only time in recorded history that a quarter of Poland's population, some 80% of the country's total work force had voluntarily joined a single organization. The movement was supported worldwide by a diverse group of leaders including Pope John Paul II, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Santiago Carillo (general secretary of the Communist party of Spain, 1960-1982), and Enrico Berlinguer (general secretary of the community party of Italy, 1972-1984+). As a newly ordained priest, Father Mirek voted in his first free election in 1990. The sweeping victory for Solidarity produced unstoppable momentum. Poland had its first democratic prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki; and, in a matter of a year, co-founder of the Solidarity movement and winner of the Nobel peace prize in 1983, Lech Walesa, became the country's new President, serving in that manner until 1995.

Before 1989, the Catholic Church in Poland was a key element in the dualistic structure of the Polish society; divided into communists, and into Polish patriots, belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. Opposition to totalitarian rule was strongly supported by the Church, which was, in turn, identified with defense of Polish national identity, freedom, human rights, and democracy. The Polish Catholic Church emerged exceptionally strong in its institutional and social structure. In fact, by the end of the 80's, the Church was considered a

decisive political actor. The Catholic Church supported the resistance against the communist regime for 20 years. It contributed to the regime's collapse and defended Poland's national identity. Today, Poland's Catholic Church still holds a strong conservative view and pursues its own political ambitions.

As already mentioned, Miroslaw Woznica, now Father Mirek Woznica, was ordained a Catholic priest on May 12, 1990, at Christ the King Cathedral, in Katowice, Poland, having earned a Master of Art in Pastoral Theology.

Another monumental change occurred as Father Mirek was setting forth as a new priest. Despite objections from the country's Protestant minority and concerns among government officials, in 1990, Poland's public schools began voluntary classes in religious education. In the 45 years of Communist rule in Poland, religious instruction was permitted in the schools in the years immediately after World War II and again in the late 1950's, when liberalization in the Soviet Union led to a temporary loosening of restrictions. After that, classes in religion were limited to after-school sessions at local churches. About 80 percent of elementary school students attended, but there was a sharp drop-off among high school students. At the vocational



***Father Mirek assists Bishop Gerard Bernacki. Father served as the bishop's secretary for 8 years while in the Archdiocese of Katowice.***

high schools, training grounds for the working-class youths who have historically been bulwarks of the Church, only 40 percent attended Church-sponsored classes. Under the agreement reached between the Church and the Government, parents decided whether elementary schoolchildren would join the twice-weekly one-hour classes. Students in the upper grades would attend only if both the parents and the children agreed. The question of returning religious instruction to the schools has been significant in Poland both to the Catholic Church hierarchy and to the faithful. When Pope John Paul II, made his first visit



*Father Mirek poses for a photo with the “kids from the Kimberley.” The children are from St. Joseph Wyndham Parish, in the Diocese of Broome, Australia.*

to this country in 1979, he spoke in Warsaw of the need to join schools and religion, prompting the crowd to break spontaneously into a hymn that says in part, “We want God in books and school.” Today in Poland, public school students must choose either a course in religion or ethics.

Father Mirek’s first appointment as priest was to fill in for priests throughout the Katowice archdiocese. However, this assignment was cancelled, when Archbishop Damian Zimón of Katowice decided he needed Father Mirek more desperately in the Church of the Transfiguration of Christ, in Katowice, as its pastor. Additionally, Father Mirek served as Bishop Gerard Bernacki’s secretary. It was in this capacity that Father Mirek served until 1997, when he petitioned Archbishop Zimón to serve in the Diocese of Broome, in the Archdiocese of Perth, in northwestern Australia.



*Father Mirek is shown here with his “skin sister” Gracy, from the Kimberleys. During Father’s time in Australia he was welcomed into the Aboriginal family. While*

*membership in skin groups is ideally based on blood relations, Australian Aboriginal kin systems are classificatory, meaning that even people who are not actual blood relations are assigned to a skin system. They are also universal, meaning that every member of the society is assigned a position in the system.*

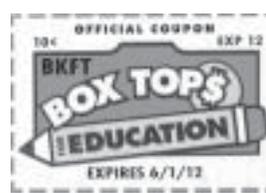
*Right: Father Mirek celebrates Christmas Mass in the desert, in Balgo, Australia.*

Archbishop of Broome, Christopher Alan Saunders, has as his responsibility, an area spanning 29,857 square miles of mostly desert-like conditions and serving 33,500 souls. Father Mirek left Poland in 1997 to attend Notre Dame University, Fremantle

people of the Kimberley and Pilbara. Father Mirek was able to learn the languages rapidly. He explained that in the aboriginal tongue there is no counting, only “one” or “more.” There is also the use of tone, inflection, and much hand movement. Father Mirek greatly enjoyed the three years he spent in Australia with Native Aboriginals. He was assigned four desert parishes.



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While in Perth, he worked in a respite house for children with disabilities. During this time, he was able to attend a type of paramedic training class offered by the Department of Health, St. John of God Health Care. This training was to serve him well while ministering to the parishes of the Kimberley peoples. Often he was asked to serve as priest, nurse, doctor, coroner, and funeral director. Father Mirek worked too with the Sisters of Mercy who were essential in organizing nurses and volunteers to assist with the health assistance most needed, that of delivering babies. If emergency services were required or a trained physician needed, they would need to be brought in by helicopter, which took about three hours, if desert conditions allowed. In bush Australia, Father found life to be very basic, sometime harsh, always without luxury. He remembers the people to be very warm and diligent about their Catholic faith.

In 2003, Father Mirek, having served his promised time in Australia, returned to Poland. Upon his return, he met Father Andrzej Maslanka. Father Andrzej had asked Archbishop Damian Zimón in 1996 to be allowed to serve in Northern Alaska, where he knew there was a great need for priests. Father Andrzej began his Alaskan ministry in Nome, serving as Associate pastor at St. Joseph Church. In 1998, after a year in Nome, Father Andrzej served the people of Galena, Alaska, at St. John Berchmans Church. In 2002, Father Andrzej returned to Poland and to the Archdiocese of Katowice, where, the following year, he met Father Mirek. It was during this discussion that Father Mirek learned of the Diocese of Fairbanks and of their great need for Catholic priests. Father Mirek was intrigued and felt particularly called to serve in the northern Missionary diocese. He felt his time in bush Australia and the training he had received would be of particular use in the harsh environment of Alaska. He too asked permission of Archbishop Damian Zimón and called Bishop Donald Kettler in 2004. In September of 2005, Father Mirek arrived in Alaska. Bishop Kettler immediately assigned him to Immaculate Conception Church, in Fairbanks. Serving in the Interior was not exactly what Father Mirek had in mind, when he set foot in Alaska. After all, Fairbanks is the Diocese's largest city, and Father Mirek had expected to serve in the bush villages of the diocese.

The small church, a historical building in Fairbanks, was constructed in 1904. The church is cherished by both Catholics and non-Catholics and is known as the "the little church on the river." Father Mirek arrived at Immaculate Conception during a time of great loss by parishioners. They had lost their Bishop and pastor all in the course of a few years. They were greatly in need of healing. On December 3, 2005, Bishop Kettler installed Father Mirek Woznica, as pastor, at the 5:30 evening Mass, saying, "Pray that God will bless you and your new pastor in a very special way." The church was filled to capacity. Bishop Kettler advised Father Mirek to "always be a loving Father, gentle shepherd, and wise teacher...to lead your people in the profession of faith." Father Mirek thanked Bishop Kettler and the parish for their warm welcome and added, "I ask for your prayers for myself and for this parish."

A reception followed and Father Mirek was presented with a black velvet, fur-lined parka. The over 350 families



*Father Mirek Woznica, Deacon Bob Mantei, and Bishop Kettler prepare at Immaculate Conception Parish, in Fairbanks, for the blessing of the processional cross.*

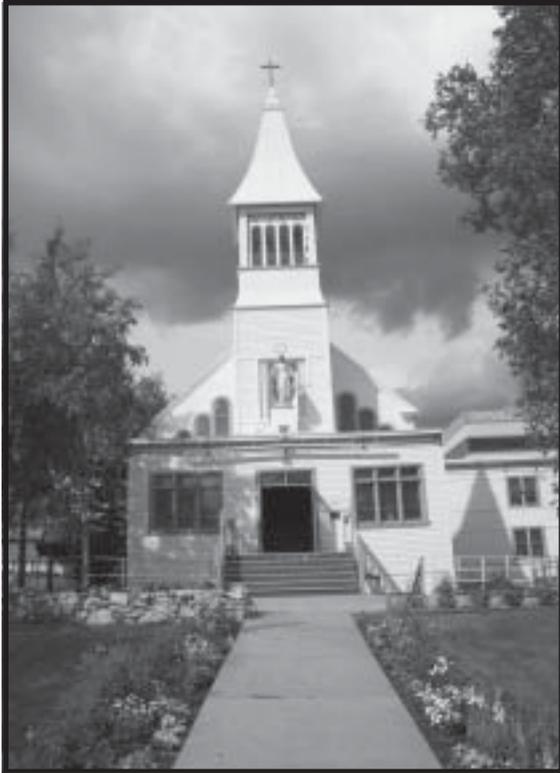
**The year 2010 finds The Alaskan Shepherd celebrating 50 Years of publication! THANK YOU for the BEAUTIFUL Anniversary Cards! We are displaying the nearly 150 cards, we have received thus far, in our little Shepherd office for all to see. Please send your card to: The Alaskan Shepherd at 1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska, 99709.**



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that comprise Immaculate Conception parish quickly adopted Father as their own. His Masses are well known for being steeped in tradition and reverence. A Mass at “the little church” is not complete until the Angelus, the Prayer to St. Michael, and the Guardian Angel Prayer, have been prayed. Additionally, Father remembers the military and their families and prays for vocations after each Mass. Father has developed a reputation of withholding the bulletin until after Mass to prevent the interruption of Holy Mass. He has also acquired a reputation among adults and children for his wonderful sense of humor. Upon arriving in Fairbanks, he recalled an instance, when he had met the late Pope John Paul II, in Poland. Father Mirek, then a Seminarian, and four other classmates decided, in an attempt to get closer to the pontiff, to don clerical collars, which they were not allowed to wear. They were surprised, when they were met by the Pope coming from the opposite direction. Pope John Paul II coming upon them asked, “You are not priests, are you?” Mirek and his companions answered a sheepish, “no” to which the Pontiff answered, “But I bless you anyway.” Father Mirek has a great gift for speaking and relating to parishioners of all ages.

One of Father Mirek’s goals during his five years at ICC has been to support the parish and its ministries. The parish runs a very successful Soup Kitchen, directed by parishioner Cindy Fields. Father says the soup kitchen is “a miracle place where I have seen miracles happen. Sometimes



*Immaculate Conception Church, Fairbanks, Alaska, the “Little Church on the River.”*

***In August of 2007, Father Mirek, during a trip in Valdez, Alaska, catches a Silver Salmon and a Halibut.***



the miracle is in the service and sometimes to those served. Always, someone shows up at just the right time with money, food, or a willingness to help serve a meal.”

The church has too a very successful religious education program for children and adults and Evening Prayer on Mondays at 7:30. Though Father Mirek has as one of his goals to support the existing ministries of the church, he is responsible for initiating a series of devotions that are well attended by parishioners and visitors. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Father leads the rosary before Mass at 12:10 PM. On Wednesday evenings, there is Exposition & Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament from 6-7 PM. Each first Thursday there is a Mass offered for Priests, Religious and new vocations. On First Fridays, after the 12:10 Mass there are prayers to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday, after the 12:10 Mass, the Divine Mercy Chaplet is prayed.

Sadly, Father Mirek will leave us on June 17, 2010, to return to his home parish in Katowice. He looks forward to seeing his family, especially his parents.

On his five years in Alaska, Father reflects that he will miss viewing the Northern Lights, but he adds, “The people are much more important to me than anything else.”

It is the parishioners of Immaculate Conception, who so warmly welcomed him back in 2005 that he will miss the most and who will dearly miss him. Father Mirek Woznica has left a mark on the hearts of the people of the Diocese of Fairbanks. We know he must have been greatly missed by his family, and his parish in Poland. He is, after all, a rock star!

—Patty Walter

—Still more NORTHERN ALASKAN PRIESTS to follow.

***“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***