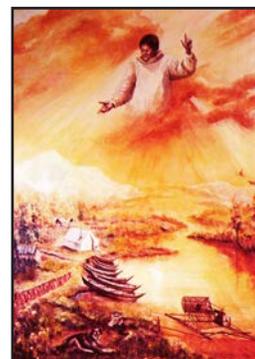




# The Alaskan Shepherd

*In the next Issue:  
Fr. Louis L. Renner, S.J.  
+March 24, 2015*



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*Some give by going to the Missions*

*Some go by going to the Missions*

*Without both there are no Missions*

## 39 Days On Little Diomedede



*Big Diomedede, Russia, looms in the background, a mere 2.4 miles away from its "Little" counterpart, in the United States. The time difference between the two islands is 21 hours. You can stand on Little Diomedede and look across and into "tomorrow" on Big Diomedede. Islanders have no way on, or off the island except by helicopters, planes, and boats. The rough seas and gusty winds of the Bering Strait, where Little Diomedede is located, make boat rides unreliable and even deadly. Since the island has no runway, the only time aircraft can safely land is the winter, and then only if the sea ice freezes enough for a plow to clear a landing strip. Above Fr. Tozzi snaps a picture of the helicopter landing on the helipad on the island.--All photos courtesy of Fr. Ross Tozzi*

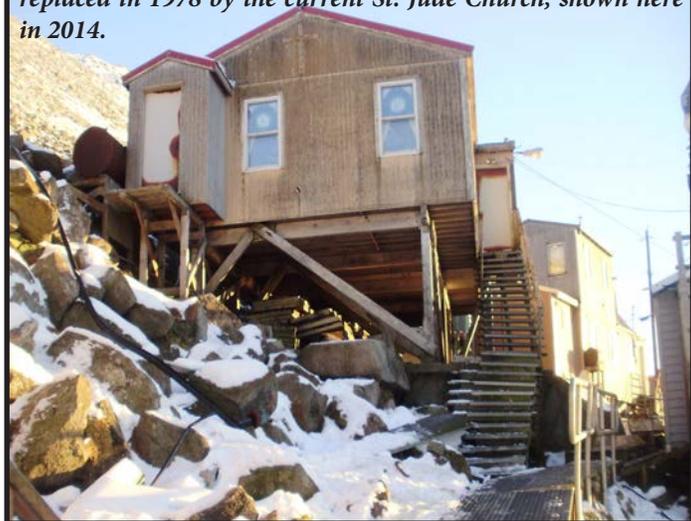
**Editor's Note:** *On July 14, 2001, Fr. Ross Tozzi was ordained to the priesthood. That ordination was an historic event; it was the first time ever that a man was ordained a Catholic priest in Nome, Alaska. Since that time, Fr. Ross has served St. Nicholas Parish in North Pole and at St. Raphael Parish in Fairbanks, and more recently, as pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Nome. He also serves the villages of Kotzebue, Teller and Diomedede. The following is an account of the 39 days Fr. Ross Tozzi spent on Little Diomedede Island where he was "held captive" both by our Alaskan weather and a series of mechanical difficulties with the helicopter—the sole means of winter transport—off of Little Diomedede. I am pleased to share with you this condensed recount from Father Tozzi's journal entries and a glimpse into the life of a Missionary priest in Alaska.*

*--Patty Walter*

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*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.*

*St. Jude Church, was first dedicated in 1936; then rebuilt and replaced in 1978 by the current St. Jude Church, shown here in 2014.*



Saint Jude Church is the most remote church in the Diocese of Fairbanks and perhaps in the United States. Located on the edge of the international dateline, the tiny island of Diomedes juts more than a thousand feet out of the sea. It is 50 miles below the Arctic Circle, over 135 miles northwest of Nome, and 2.4 miles from Russia's Big Diomedes Island. With no flat, accessible surface for an airstrip, the community there has relied on an ice runway, on the frozen sea, during the long winter months for many years. Bush airplane flights used to transport mail, passengers, groceries, and supplies, on a daily basis during the winter months, weather permitting.

Weather is not always conducive to regularly scheduled flights. My first pastoral visit, in 2010, to Little Diomedes was extended at the start of the year, from 7 days to 12 days while I waited for good weather. The year 2013 had a runway opening for only two weeks in April before the ice gave way to warmer weather and the sea currents. The year 2014 was too warm of a winter for any transport service. I was not able to fly to Little Diomedes until November of 2014. On November 8<sup>th</sup>--when a special press conference for the announcement of our new bishop was called--I listened with joy, sharing the news with the parishioners of Saint Jude the following morning.

Winter travel is limited to a Monday flight for essential passenger service and a Wednesday flight for mail when the weather is flightworthy and the chopper is airworthy. The Wednesday mail usually takes precedence over passenger service if the Monday flight has been delayed.

Most often, ministry to the Little Diomedes takes place in Nome where many have relocated. If memory serves me correctly, I first met Alice Soolook in June of 2010, when she came in from Anchorage

## **TOZZI, Fr. Ross A.**

*Excerpted from **Alaskana Catholica**,*

*By Fr. Louis. L. Renner, SJ*



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. 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. Having a difficult time saying "no," he wound up serving at KNOM for three years. During those years, he also worked for the Nome-based Northwest Campus of the University of Alaska as its business manager.

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.

In 1989, the year he became a member of the JVC, Ross received a letter from Fr. Brad R. Reynolds, Vocation Director for the Oregon Province of the Society of Jesus, asking him if he would consider a call to priesthood. 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?'" Though he kept turning a deaf ear, God, however, kept calling out to Ross to join the priesthood. In the summer of 1993, on one of Ross' many visits to Nome, Fr. Jack de Verteuil, associate pastor of St. Joseph's parish, Nome, at the time, encouraged him, saying, "Ross, 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 Fr. 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 out and, in so doing,

to attend a funeral and decided to stay in town. Little did I realize I would preside at her funeral a few years later. I recall just recently--Christmas 2014, after morning Mass—that I made a home visit to bring Holy Communion to some of the elders too fragile to make it to church that morning. Among my stops was the apartment of Alice Soolook. She always wore a beautiful smile on her face and joyfully received Holy Communion and the Anointing of the Sick. Nine days later, I was 183 miles north of Nome, at Saint Francis Xavier Church, in Kotzebue, when Alice was called home to the Lord.

Alice Ann 'Eenanga' Soolook was born September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1933, on Little Diomed Island, the fourth child of Martha and Thomas Iyapana. As a young child, she grew up learning all the traditional Diomed ways. She married the one true love of her life, Robert Soolook, Sr., and raised eleven children. Traveling from all over the state, eight of her children attended her funeral Mass, on January 10<sup>th</sup>, at Saint Joseph Catholic Church, in Nome.

On January 12<sup>th</sup>, I planned to travel to Little Diomed for Alice's funeral and burial along with eight of her children and one extra guest. Seven-week-old May Rose had come to Nome for medical care and needed an escort back. (Available seats on the helicopter are scarce and neither parent was able to escort their daughter to Nome.) I didn't feel qualified to be in charge of a newborn infant. But, after an insistent call from the parents, I agreed to hand-carry their precious daughter on the next chopper flight to Little Diomed.

Weather was too poor the week of the 12<sup>th</sup> and subsequently there were no passenger flights. I made daily calls to check on the possibility of a flight and waited patiently for the weather to improve. Decent weather finally arrived on Wednesday, but the mail service had first priority. No one flew from Nome to Little Diomed that week. The helicopter flies from Nome to Diomed with all the mail it can hold and then shuttles to and from Wales, bringing additional bypass mail for the grocery store.

On Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup>, I finished the morning Mass. Then, I made it to the helicopter hangar with the help of a parishioner to greet two of Alice's children, who arrived with their mother's body, which was triple-wrapped in a transport bag. We had borrowed a casket for the funeral in Nome, but the Bölkow BO-105 helicopter could not accommodate a casket of any size, necessitating the transport bag for her final flight home. May Rose was delivered to me at the airport

## TOZZI, Fr. Ross A., cont.

took the first concrete step along the road that was to lead to his being ordained a priest six years later.

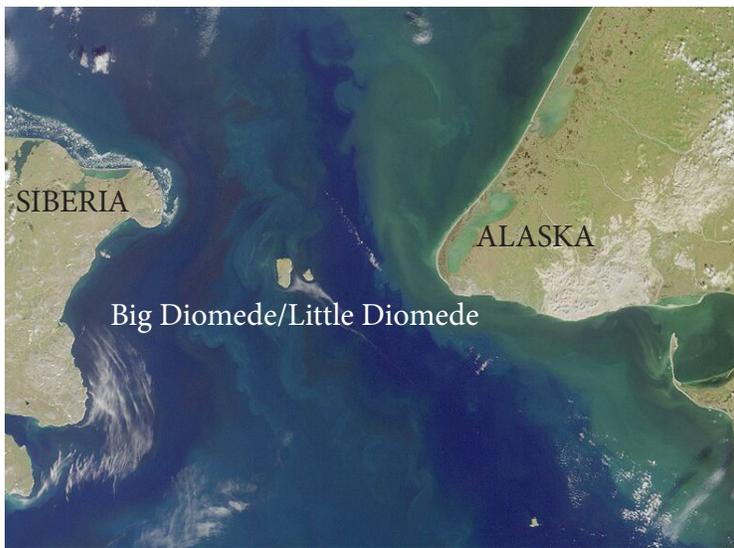
In the fall of 1996, Ross began formal studies for the priesthood at Mount Angel Seminary at St. Benedict, Oregon. At the end of the academic year 2000-2001, he graduated with a M.A. and a MDiv degree in Sacred Theology. For his thesis topic he had chosen *The Spirituality of Therese of Lisieux*.

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, Fr. 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 Fr. 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.

Fr. Tozzi's first assignment as a priest was that of associate pastor to Fr. 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, Fr. Tozzi was named pastor of St. Nicholas parish in North Pole. In 2006, upon the retirement of Fr. John Hinsvark, Bishop Kettler assigned Fr. Tozzi to replace him as Vocations Director. In the year 2009, Fr. Ross was assigned pastor of St. Joseph's Parish in Nome, Alaska, and pastor of St. Francis Xavier Parish, Kotzebue, St. Ann Parish, Teller, and St. Jude Parish, on Little Diomed Island. Fr. Tozzi's last day on Diomed Island, as its pastor, February 28, 2015, was also his last day serving as Vocation Director for the Diocese of Fairbanks, the position currently held by Fr. Robert Fath.

Beginning April of 2015, Fr. Ross will take a sabbatical. Upon his return, in January of 2016, he will assume a new assignment in Fairbanks as Vicar General of the Diocese and Rector of Sacred Heart Cathedral, in Fairbanks.



were invited to watch a football game on satellite TV in one of the classrooms. After a day of rest—the illness ran its course. I made frequent trips to the rest room while Terry checked the weather, constantly, via the internet. He also called home to Tennessee to check on the status of his family as he was expecting a second grandchild at any time. Finally, the following afternoon, he saw a small opportunity to return to Nome.

Meanwhile, the helicopter had suffered the brunt of the storm. It was parked on the ice and was being battered by high winds and a constant barrage of snow. The weather and dwindling daylight were not good enough to make it to Little Diomede. Terry decided to fly back to Nome and wait for the weather to improve. Family helped to move Alice's body to the Lutheran Church where each evening the community would gather to sing hymns in order to console the family. This practice continued until the family was able to leave Wales, and return to Diomede.

Weather conditions were poor on Tuesday and all passenger flights were canceled. Terry made accommodations for me to travel with the mail on the 21<sup>st</sup>. I rode in the co-pilot's seat careful not to move lest my feet interfere with any of the foot controls. 45 minutes out from Nome, visibility once again became a problem and Terry gently spiraled the helicopter upwards to get above the clouds. We turned around and around so many times; I thought we were headed back to Nome. Half an hour later, a small gap in the clouds appeared and Terry descended to make a safe landing on the helipad in Little Diomede.

### **January 21<sup>st</sup> –Feet on Island**

Five minutes was all it took to unload the helicopter of the incoming mail. Terry shuttled back and forth between Wales bringing additional by-pass mail (groceries) for the store and one passenger at a time except for the run that included little May Rose in the caring arms of one of Alice's sons.

Little Diomede had 4 to 5 feet of snow in the days just prior to my arrival. I was extremely grateful that May Rose's father had shoveled the lower steps of the church making it easier for me to get into the church and rectory. Of course, my gratitude paled in comparison with that of the joyful mother and father now reunited with their 11½-week-old daughter.

The Laser stove that provides heat to the tiny rectory had not been turned on since November 10<sup>th</sup> and it proved to be a little temperamental. The room temperature was 13 degrees at eye level and considerably colder on the floor. Slowly the temperature rose to 60 degrees, which I found to be its limit. When

and I boarded with my precious cargo in arms to carry back to Little Diomede.

### **January 18—Nome to Little Diomede... Oops, I mean Wales**

With passable weather, the helicopter took off around noon. I kept my eyes on May Rose and prayed constantly for a safe flight. As the flight wore on, I began to feel ill and was completely unaware that we had flown into the middle of a snowstorm. My eyes were only focused on little May Rose. Terry, the alert pilot, turned to go back to Nome but the storm in front of him had come up behind him as well. Unable to see the airstrip in Wales, he found a clear spot on the ice near some homes and made an emergency landing. Providentially, he landed within 150 yards of where Alice's children were staying. Five of Alice's daughters and one son had flown by plane to Wales where they had already been waiting for several days.

Clyde, the helicopter agent in Wales, met the chopper out on the frozen ice and reassured Terry that he had made a very wise and safe decision to land where he did. Since the storm would take some time to run its course, Terry emptied the helicopter. In a warm, protective parka, one of Alice's daughters enveloped May Rose and brought her to a nearby home where the Soolooks were camped out. May Rose and Alice's two sons were well taken care of by a family that was pleased to have a few more guests. Meanwhile, I struggled to deal with a sudden illness that had come on mid-flight; I bent over, struggling to breath. Terry was concerned that I was upset over the emergency landing but I explained that it was the illness instead. We stopped briefly in the home where the Soolooks had gathered and then Terry and I were escorted over to the school. Cots were set up in the library and we

I tried to get it a little warmer, the heater rebelled and went into error mode. For several days, I could not warm the rectory above 60 degrees. One afternoon, Alice's son Robert stopped by and told me the secret was to let it rise gradually. This technique allowed me to warm the room to a more comfortable temperature of 64 degrees.

### **January 22<sup>nd</sup>—Farewell to Alice**

Alice and the last of the family members arrived on Thursday afternoon. Our second funeral Mass began at 3:00 PM in the school gym twelve days after Alice's funeral Mass in Nome. This time, instead of a borrowed casket from the hospital, Alice was laid out in a hand built wooden coffin made by her son Dennis. A few of Alice's daughters applied the finishing paint.

As is often the case with funerals in rural Alaska, transportation makes it difficult to hold a vigil service the night before a funeral. After the Mass, the casket top is laid to the side offering everyone a chance to view their beloved and pay their final respects. The tears flowed generously as people grieved for Alice and offered their condolences to the family. For me, the most touching moment of the afternoon was when the 10 children present, knelt around the coffin and sang a hymn to their dearly departed mother.

Having no flat ground for a cemetery, the coffin was hauled up the steep mountain by the pallbearers for temporary burial. Once the snow melts in the late spring, her children will resituate the casket more permanently. I attempted to follow the burial party up the mountain but was not dressed sufficiently to withstand the wind and snow on my exposed face. Within a day, daughter Nancy presented me with a knit scarf that had been hand made by Alice.

Once the burial party returned to the school, a meal of turkey, ham, potatoes, cranberries, macaroni

and potato salad and numerous desserts was enjoyed by all. Anticipating a funeral on the 12<sup>th</sup>, the original salads had been given away before they spoiled and new salads were prepared that day. The island grocery store carries no fresh vegetables, no frozen food, and no meat. People often call the store in Nome for items unavailable locally and thus the 5 dozen eggs special ordered arrived albeit in a frozen state.

After the meal, the dishes were cleaned and the tables put away so the gym could host Eskimo dancing. A little girl, whom I had baptized in the spring of 2012, was now at the age of 3½, trying to learn the Eskimo dance steps.

### **January 26<sup>th</sup>—Heading Home? Not Yet**

January 26<sup>th</sup> was the scheduled day of my departure for Nome. Due to helicopter mechanical problems, all passenger flights were on hold. Instead of heading to Little Diomed, the pilot flew south to Anchorage for extensive repairs. He hoped for a quick turnaround and initially anticipated picking up a working helicopter and flying back to Nome on Tuesday. Mike, the new pilot who had just begun his two-week shift, hoped to fly mail in and passengers out.

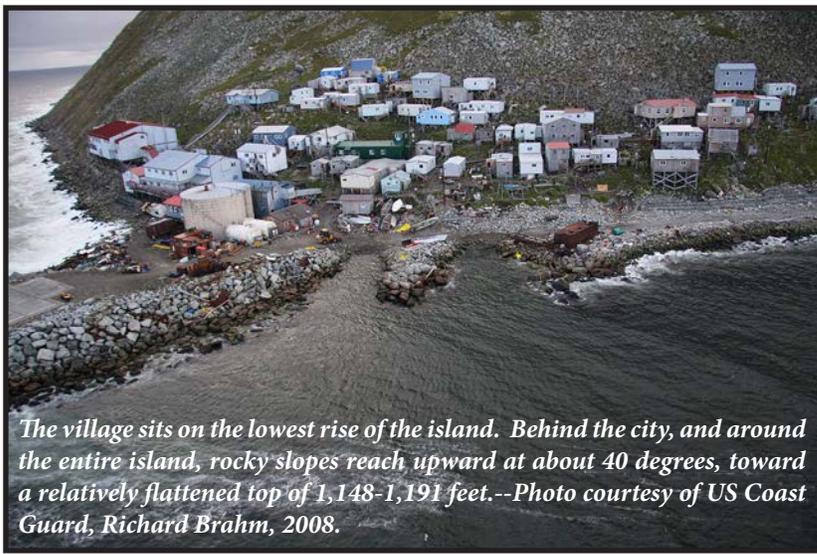
Failure to depart precipitated another worry for me that day. The small heater in the rectory changed from its usual error code to a new one around 4:00 AM, indicating that the fuel had run out. From the comfort of my sleeping bag, I decided to go back to sleep and to worry about things in the light of day.

During my November 2014 visit, I had 10 gallons of fuel added to the tank after cutting off a rusty lock and putting on a temporary one. I say temporary as I did not have a key for the new lock and knew with the next visit, I would need to cut off this temporary lock. By mid-morning, Alice's son Eddie came to the rescue with a pair of bolt cutters, freeing the tank for fuel delivery. Joe, a city worker who assists elders, agreed to assist me around mid-afternoon. A little snow shoveling and a few outside chores kept me warm as I waited.

Shortly before 2:00 PM, Joe arrived and cheerfully jumped on top of the 300-gallon tank to add ten gallons of fuel. At \$8.65 a gallon, the cost of heating a home in Little Diomed is a major expense. There are no trucks, no streets, and no way of delivering fuel other than by hauling it, in five or 10-gallon fuel containers. With the addition of the first container of fuel, I turned on the laser stove and the temperature quickly rose from 40 to 58 degrees in about 30 minutes. Ten gallons of fuel would assure reliable heat for at least two weeks.



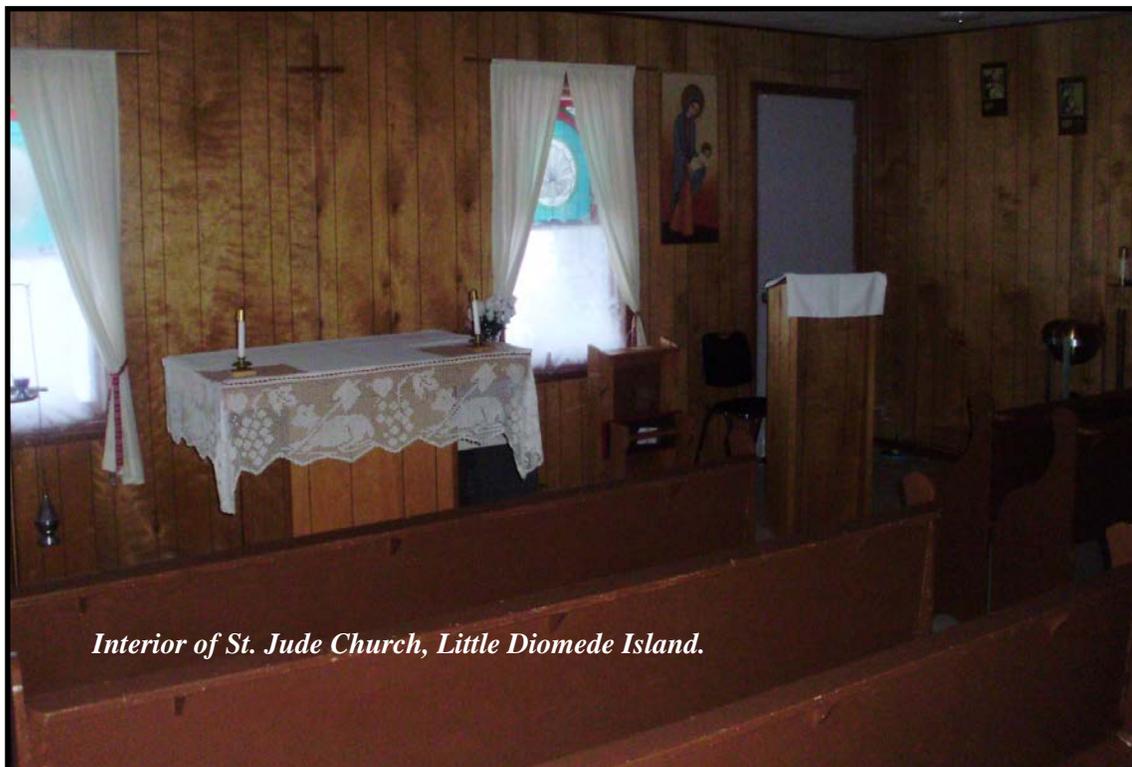
*View of Big Diomed from the door of St. Jude Church.*



*The village sits on the lowest rise of the island. Behind the city, and around the entire island, rocky slopes reach upward at about 40 degrees, toward a relatively flattened top of 1,148-1,191 feet.--Photo courtesy of US Coast Guard, Richard Brahm, 2008.*

### **February 2<sup>nd</sup> –Feast of the Presentation**

On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Feast of the Presentation, I blessed two candles for the Feast of Saint Blaise the following day. As residents of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania know well, February 2<sup>nd</sup> is also Groundhog Day. I am reminded of the movie with the same name. Each day when the alarm clock goes off, “Phil” relives Groundhog Day, repeatedly. I had this déjà vu feeling when I called to check on the chances of leaving each day. The message at the helicopter hangar was always the same, “Hello... currently all flights are on hold due to maintenance issues with the helicopter.” Even though the Nome office message remains unchanged, I kept abreast of the next anticipated date through Eric the postmaster and his fiancée, Irene, who got updates from the local agent in Diomed.



*Interior of St. Jude Church, Little Diomed Island.*

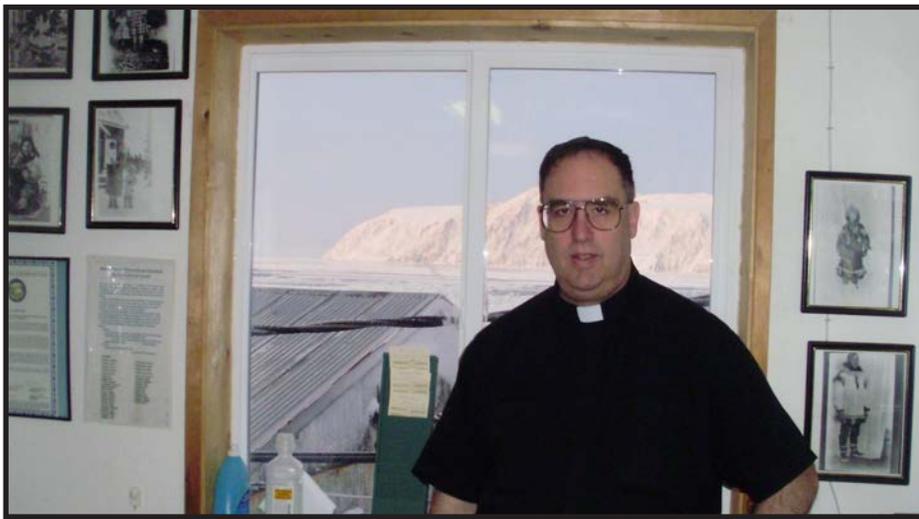
On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, I paid a visit to May Rose and offered the Blessing of Throats to all in her family.

Looking for fresh reading material, I scanned the shelves of the tiny library in the rectory and came across a book that had probably lain dormant for over 30 years, a book entitled *Lay Hands on the Sick* written by Fr. Matthew Swizdor, O.F.M., Conv. In the book, Fr. Matthew recounted his seminary training which stressed Extreme Unction (Anointing of the Sick) only when someone was near the point of death. This struck Fr. Matthew as odd as the practice at that time was a polar opposite from the healing ministry of Jesus. Inspired by Fr. Matthew’s book and the daily readings for Mass, I offered to lay hands on all who were attending daily Mass. The following day, Andrew, a St. Jude parishioner, told me the story of his own miracle. He had been struck by a cab several years ago while in Nome. He had no immediate problems. However as time wore on, and beyond the limits of any insurance coverage, he began to develop an aggravating pain that would not go away. Medication helped a little but the pain always returned. The day after I had laid hands on him in prayer, he began to experience life again without the nagging pain. Now instead of a disposition affected by pain, he displays a real sensitivity to the needs of others, often going out of his way to offer others assistance.

Before Mass on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, we are informed that there will be further delays of several days. Amidst a group of three others, one person offers advice, “Father, it’s okay if you get angry.” Disappointed, but not surprised, I laughed off the suggestions for me to blow off some steam. The Lord has me here for a purpose and each day the healing touch of the Lord is visible and tangible in one way or another. A young couple who had buried their newborn without the benefit of a funeral appears at daily Mass together. I hope that the words I spoke during the homily offered a little consolation in the midst of their grief.

### **February 6<sup>th</sup>— Medical Flight Out**

On my way to Mass on Friday the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, I learned that



*Fr. Ross Tozzi stands in the Little Diomed Tribal Hall which looks out on Big Diomed Island. The village of Little Diomed sits on a small patch by the ocean. It is the only area that is not almost-vertical cliffs. The village must be traveled on foot which is a steep and difficult process. The weather can be extremely cold and windy for many months out the year and blizzards are not uncommon. The Bering Strait is generally frozen from December to mid-June. Archaeologists believe the present village site to be 3,000 years or older.*

a Blackhawk military helicopter was coming to Little Diomed on a mission of mercy, to transport a young woman needing medical attention. I immediately went over to the tiny clinic and offered the young woman the Anointing of the Sick. I left her to the care of the village health aide and went on to set up for Mass as everyone anxiously awaited the arrival of the emergency medical run.

The Blackhawk touched down on the helipad at 4:49 PM and kept the engine running. When the commercial company flights come, they unload and are back in the air within the span of 5 or 10 minutes. This particular medical flight operated by the National Guard did not take off for 31 minutes. Later on, I learned that May Rose, who also needed to return to Nome for medical care, was able to secure passage on the medical flight, accompanied by her father.

Friday evening, the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, I attended the monthly meeting of the Tribal Council. The meeting originally scheduled for January 16<sup>th</sup> had been postponed due to the pending funeral of Alice. What a beautiful testament to the priority of mourning for the dead.

There were many important issues on the agenda including restrictions to the Diomeders' subsistence way of life proposed by national and international bodies. With no mail service for three weeks, a number of individuals were having financial difficulties. Checks have not arrived in the mail. Groceries are stockpiling in the post office annex in Nome and the store shelves are bare in Little Diomed. The school, after checking with the district office for permission, has offered to serve meals to help tide people over until the chopper returns.

Monday, the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, brought another worry for me. Every call I tried to make on my cell phone failed. I used a pay phone near the post office to try to contact the phone company but every call failed and I lost \$4.00 off my pre-paid phone card. Alice's daughter

Nancy lent me her working cell phone and I was able to recharge my phone with a thousand minutes good for the next 30 days.

As I was worrying about my own minor inconvenience, I learned of a much more serious matter that had occurred in the middle of the night. A 3½-year-old had wandered from the safety and security of a warm home and found herself lost outdoors with no shoes, no coat, no hat, no gloves, and no sense of direction. She was quickly rescued and suffered frostbitten hands and ears, but all were relieved that she came through what could have been a life-threatening situation. When the family of the little girl arrived at the Monday evening Mass, I weaved the story of her rescue into the homily amidst a crowd of 19. True to her wandering ways, she approached the altar and wanted to see up close what I was doing. This time, however, she was bundled warmly and she turned back any help to remove a few of the layers of clothing while indoors.

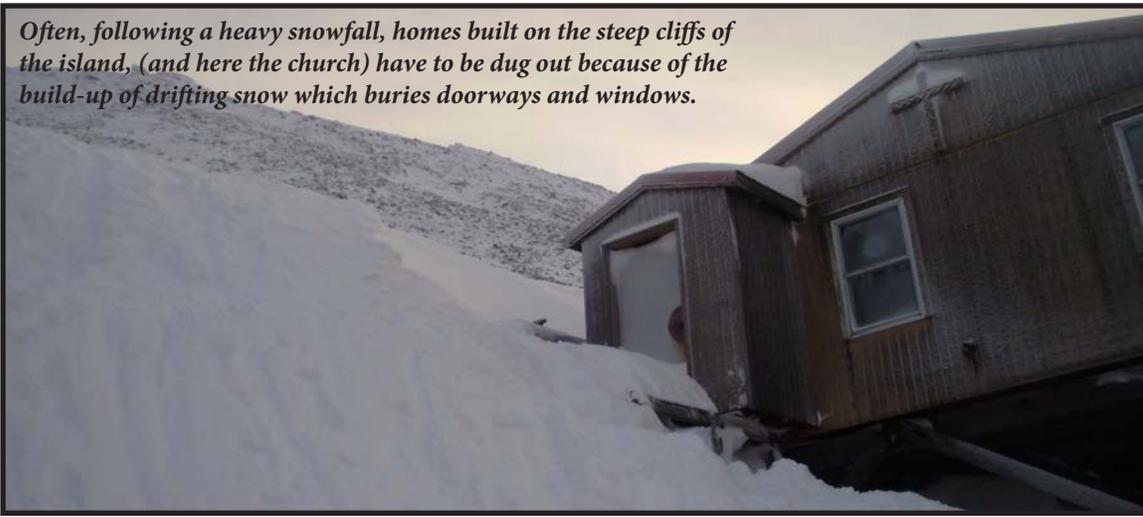
The helicopter, now out of service for 2 ½ weeks, was expected to make an appearance on Wednesday, the 11<sup>th</sup>, with the mail. It had been repaired and reassembled with spare parts ordered from Germany. While it was able to make a test flight, it was not able to make the longer flight. For my part, I celebrated with this impromptu poem, "Hip, Hip, Hooray, I get to stay for another day!" Little did I know that it would be much more than a day.

### **February 12<sup>th</sup>—All Flights on Hold**

By 11:15 AM, Thursday the 12<sup>th</sup>, I received the not surprising message that the helicopter had left Anchorage only to turn back, due to poor weather. The pilot had only been in the air for 30 minutes before making the decision to return to base and wait on better weather.

In anticipation of commercial service being restored, the school cancelled any further lunch and dinner meals for the community. Just as the store shelves were becoming more and more bare, so too

*Often, following a heavy snowfall, homes built on the steep cliffs of the island, (and here the church) have to be dug out because of the build-up of drifting snow which buries doorways and windows.*



January 26th to February 14th to reflect the date change, still played the same message, "All flights are on hold until mechanical issues are resolved." Unfortunately, the mechanics are unable to fly out to check on the helicopter until tomorrow.

Sunday the 15th, a maintenance crew flies out to Wales trying to fix the helicopter. However,

since that helicopter cannot be fixed we are promised that they will bring the big chopper tomorrow.

with the school's own food supplies that hadn't been replenished. The city and tribe had discussed requesting an emergency run of the Blackhawk helicopter with state, federal and regional officials but it was decided that with the helicopter repaired, it wouldn't hurt to wait just a little bit longer.

Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of February brought welcome news. The pilot had reached Nome and planned to make several runs to bring the mail out to Little Diomed while daylight lasted. I was asked if I wanted to be on the first flight to Wales but declined. My preference was a direct flight back to Nome on the last flight of the day. With each flight out of Little Diomed, the helicopter is able to ferry three passengers over to Wales where they can then wait on a plane to take them back to Nome. On the return flight to Little Diomed from Wales, the helicopter is filled with bypass mail (food, stockpiled there for transport to the Diomed store.)

After the first flight took off, I brought my luggage to the basement of Diomed City Hall and watched the excitement of everyone gathering outside the post office as the postmaster quickly sorted mail. No one had received mail since the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January and many were anxious to see if end of the month checks had arrived. The postmaster asked for a bag of outgoing mail to be taken on the first flight out, but those loading the plane suggest that it could wait for the last flight.

Forty-five minutes after the helicopter first landed, I estimated it should be back momentarily . . . but that did not happen. The sun continued to set but there was no chopper. Later on, the pilot informed me that a caution light went on as one engine failed in the helicopter. He made an emergency landing on the airfield in Wales and knew there would be no further flights until that helicopter was repaired.

Saturday the 14<sup>th</sup> offered a little variety. The message on the answering machine, though updated from

### **February 16<sup>th</sup>--Out Of Fuel**

It's a Monday so I am not surprised when the fuel runs out early in the morning. The time to queue up for heating fuel prior to the weekend closure also coincided with the anticipated arrival of the helicopter. Anticipating a ride out of Diomed on the 13th and knowing that the fuel tank needed to be replaced, I obtained no heating fuel on Friday afternoon.

My sleeping bag was warm and comfortable and as there is no plumbing to freeze, the lack of heat is a minor inconvenience. I would usually turn the heat down to 50 degrees at night and be comfortable. In the daytime, I even learned to be comfortable at 58 degrees with the help of several layers of clothing and a hat.

Checking on the availability of a flight back to Nome I am able to talk directly with Terry the pilot. He hoped that I had been praying for him on Friday afternoon when the caution light came on and he had to shut off the 2<sup>nd</sup> engine of the helicopter and make an emergency landing with just one engine.

Looking for Justin to help with some fuel, I went to visit his mother and learned that I was not the only one who had run out of heating fuel. The temperature in the home had dropped to 40 degrees but it was a bit more comfortable than the rectory at this point. I enjoyed a delicious breakfast of Spam, biscuits, and oatmeal.

By 4:00 PM, the fuel is in the tank and the rectory heats up quickly. The church however is a bit chilly when people arrive for daily Mass at 5:30 PM so I advise them to keep their hats and coats on.

On Tuesday, even though I had fuel in the tank, the heater did not seem to be working well. Dennis volunteered to come by on Ash Wednesday and look at the heater.

## Did you know?

Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion (LWHC) services are celebrated on Sundays when a priest is not in the village. At this time, on any given Sunday there are at least 18 of the 24 parishes in the Y-K Delta region that celebrate LWHC. In parishes where there are deacons, the deacon leads the service. In parishes that do not have deacons, lay women and men lead the services.

Parishes that have assigned priests (only 14) see a priest about every three to eight weeks (these parishes have Sunday and daily Mass while the priest is there. His visit could be a few days or up to two weeks.) Parishes that have priests coming from Fairbanks celebrate Eucharist about once every three months. The priest coming from Fairbanks may be in a village only three to four days.

Good and gracious God, you have called us through Baptism to discipleship with your Son, Jesus Christ, and have sent us to bring the Good News of salvation to all peoples.

**We pray you to grant us more priests, clergy and religious to build up your Church within the Missionary Diocese of Fairbanks, Alaska.**

Inspire young men and women to give themselves totally to the work of Christ and His Church.

We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen



## 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 12th, 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.

### CLIP & KEEP : Prayer



You are also invited to join us on the novena days (June 4th through 12th) 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!

### CLIP & SEND BACK: Intentions

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

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Dear Bishop Zielinski,

Date **F01 S201502**

I want to help you and the missionaries ministering in Northern Alaska to bring the Mass, the Sacraments, religious education, and training to the widely-scattered Indian and Eskimo people of Christ. Please accept this donation to your **General Fund** and use it where most needed.

AMOUNT OF GIFT:  \$15  \$25  \$50  \$100  \$250  Other\$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ StreetNo. \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

If donating by credit card: **NAME AS IT APPEARS ON CREDIT CARD:** \_\_\_\_\_

TYPE OF CARD (Visa, Master Card or Discover Cards only): **VISA** \_\_\_\_\_ **MASTER CARD** \_\_\_\_\_ **DISCOVER** \_\_\_\_\_

One Time Only:( ) Monthly:( ) Quarterly:( ) Twice A Year: ( ) Annually:( )

CREDIT CARD NUMBER: (Strictly confidential): \_\_\_\_\_

EXP DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA/CBNA 1312 PEGER ROAD\*FAIRBANKS, AK\*99709

Dear Bishop Zielinski,

Date **F04 S201502**

I want to help you repair and rebuild your Mission Churches in Northern Alaska.

Please accept this donation to your **Church Renewal Fund**.

AMOUNT OF GIFT:  \$15  \$25  \$50  \$100  \$250  Other\$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ StreetNo. \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

If donating by credit card: **NAME AS IT APPEARS ON CREDIT CARD:** \_\_\_\_\_

TYPE OF CARD (Visa, Master Card or Discover Cards only): **VISA** \_\_\_\_\_ **MASTER CARD** \_\_\_\_\_ **DISCOVER** \_\_\_\_\_

One Time Only:( ) Monthly:( ) Quarterly:( ) Twice A Year: ( ) Annually:( )

CREDIT CARD NUMBER: (Strictly confidential): \_\_\_\_\_

EXP DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA/CBNA 1312 PEGER ROAD\*FAIRBANKS, AK\*99709

In the next Issue:  
The Life and Accomplishments of  
Fr. Louis L. Renner, S.J.  
1926-2015



*I, for my part, am already  
poured out like a libation.  
The time for my dissolution has come.  
I have fought the good fight;  
I have finished the race;  
I have kept the faith;  
From now on, a merited crown is mine.  
The Lord, just judge that He is,  
has awarded it to me.  
2 Timothy 4:6-8*

Born: April 25, 1926  
Bismarck, North Dakota  
  
Entered the Society of Jesus  
March 24, 1944  
  
Ordained  
June 15, 1957  
Spokane, Washington  
  
Died: March 24, 2015  
Spokane, Washington



*Your first class 49¢ stamp donations  
are greatly appreciated.*



*St. Jude Church after the blizzard.*

During his lunch hour the next day, Dennis stopped by with tools and absorbent pads to see if he could fix the problem. There was a lot of frost on the fuel line to the heater and he correctly surmised that the fuel line had frozen on the inside of the building. An hour later, the heater was up and running better than ever.

Meanwhile repairs on the helicopter in Wales were not proceeding smoothly and we were promised, (once again) that a newer helicopter would fly up from Anchorage once it was ready. This newer helicopter was supposed to be ready by Friday. It made an effort to fly from Anchorage but apparent mechanical problems forced it to return to Anchorage. Later on, we hear that it made it as far as McGrath before having to be grounded.

### **February 20<sup>th</sup>—Polar Bear Watch**

The 20<sup>th</sup> is Terry's last day of work so I call and leave a message for him on the answering machine in Nome to wish him well. He is retiring to work for another company perhaps something a little closer to home so he can spend more time with his family and newborn granddaughter.

When I attended Friday's evening tribal council meeting as an observer, I learned that the children going off to school in the morning have an added layer of community safety as two people keep an eye out for polar bears. However, a concern was raised that no one is watching in the evening hours when children have an opportunity for extra gym time at the school between 7:00 and 9:00 PM. Without hesitation, the council voted to approve an evening polar bear watcher for the safety of the children. During my extended stay in the community, many eyes had seen the polar bears over 2 miles away on the Russian side of the international dateline and a few days later those same bears had crossed the open water (without showing any passports) to arrive in America.

Word comes Saturday morning, the 21<sup>st</sup>, that

the chopper is back together and a Monday flight is anticipated. However, the weather keeps the helicopter grounded in Anchorage on Monday.

Having cranked the heat up a little higher in the rectory and in the church this past week, I unfortunately burned through the fuel during a cold spell at twice the normal rate. The fuel ran out Sunday morning around 9:00 AM. Temperatures are warmer, the snow is melting, and the church is quite comfortable for 10:30 AM Mass. I opt not to ask Justin for help and allow him to have a day of rest for the Sabbath. On Monday, he gently chides me for not using a little common sense and asking for help sooner. Temperatures remain warm outside and the sun helps to keep the rectory at a livable temperature.

Tuesday afternoon brings news of the arrival of the replacement helicopter in Nome. Once the weather is acceptable, the pilot will bring the mail. The old saying is that "when it rains, it pours." However, here in western Alaska the temperatures have dipped below freezing and we hunker down for a three-day rip-roaring blizzard that negates any chance of helicopter service.

My extended pastoral visit to Little Diomedé meant that I had to cancel a number of other travel plans, including a trip to San Diego, (February 2-5) and a trip to Anchorage (February 23-26) where I had looked forward to gathering with all of the priests from the state for our annual convocation. As the convocation was preparing to close, I received a surprise phone call from Bishop Chad Zielinski, who was gathered with all of the priests of the Diocese of Fairbanks. After a brief conversation, I was invited to offer the closing prayer for the convocation. Recalling how Jesus knelt at the feet of the apostles to wash their feet on Holy Thursday, I asked that we always seek to serve others with the same love as our Lord.

### **February 27<sup>th</sup>—A Heartwarming Call**

Friday morning, the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, I was at the home of Eric and Irene enjoying a pancake and powdered egg breakfast, when I received a call from Saint Nicholas Parish where I had served as pastor from 2002-2009. Betty and the morning Mass crowd in North Pole called to let me know they were ALL praying for my safe return. Indeed many people had been praying for me from around the Diocese, around the state, and around the country.

### **February 28<sup>th</sup>—There's No Place Like Home**

At 3:12 PM on the last day of the month, an audible cheer rang throughout the village as everyone spotted the helicopter that was bringing mail for the first time in 15 days. As the chopper approached the helipad, it stirred up a cloud of snow. It had snowed so heavily overnight in Diomedé that the helicopter disappeared shortly into the windblown cloud of snow it had generated. Within

10 minutes of landing, the chopper was lifting off again in order to pick up the next load of mail from the cargo container in Wales, which had been stockpiled all these days with groceries for the tiny Native store.

It seemed an unusually long time before the helicopter returned. As the crew was refueling in Wales, it appeared that another mechanical problem was rearing its ugly head. More careful analysis revealed that there was not a problem with the fuel line, just an error in overfilling the tank. Two hours later, the helicopter made its second landing with another full load of groceries for the store, and within ten minutes, groceries unloaded, it was off again for Wales.

Justin ran up to the church to let me know I should be ready for the next flight as it would be the last trip of the day and my best opportunity to fly back to Nome. I tended to last minute chores and prayed Evening Prayer before packing my Liturgy of the Hours prayer book. One would normally be praying from the prayers for Lent however, I had not anticipated a 39-day stay in Little Diomed and had only the volume for the beginning of Ordinary Time.

Without any hiccups, the helicopter returned from Wales 45 minutes later. I boarded with Justin and two of Alice's daughters, who were still longing to be reconnected with family and friends. At 6:16 PM, we lifted from the helipad and began a sweep north before heading east to the village of Wales, 27 miles away. I held back tears. What a joy and a privilege it had been to be present with the people of Diomed during such a trying time for the community.

Instead of returning directly to Nome, we headed for Wales and were asked to exit the helicopter and wait in the cargo container (now nearly empty of food). I had an opportunity to talk to Clyde, the Wales Agent whom I had last seen on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January. He introduced me to his son and explained that the lack of helicopter service for Diomed had been difficult for him too. No flights meant no work, and less income to support his family.

As we landed in Wales, we saw the disabled helicopter that had sat next to the airstrip since February 13<sup>th</sup>. The rotor blades had been taken down to protect them, but otherwise, the helicopter had been exposed to the cold, the wind, and the snow for better than two weeks. Clyde explained that there was a new engine in Nome that would be flown out on Sunday. It would replace the one that had failed. Once that new engine was installed, the company would fly it back to Nome, and then to a city farther south, so that it might be used as a spare if it was needed in the future.

At 6:54 PM, the helicopter lifted off from Wales with a pilot, a co-pilot, and two mechanics on board, plus four passengers that had come from Diomed. An hour (and one minute) later, we landed safely in Nome. I spoke briefly with Mike the pilot as I awaited a ride back to St. Joseph Church and Rectory.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of October, 2011, Mike had flown me out to Little Diomed and back to Nome when I presided at the funeral Mass for Thomas Soolook. That 4-hour special charter flight had been my shortest trip to and from Little Diomed. As Providence would have it, Mike would also be part of my longest trip to Little Diomed.

My planned 6-day trip for the burial of Alice Soolook begun at noon, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, and had now finally come to an end on February 28<sup>th</sup>, a mere 39 days later.

Yes, I do mean a "mere" 39 days later. There had been no direct passenger service to Diomed since before the 10<sup>th</sup> of January. Those in Nome who were trying to get to Diomed, were still on hold, as the mail took precedence. The local

phone company had been trying to send a technician out for two months to deal with internet outages, and he was still trying to get out when I went to the phone company to pay my overdue phone bill on March 2<sup>nd</sup>.

When it comes to travel to or from Little Diomed, both patience and a long lead-time are usually needed. Fortunately, God saw to it that I had ample quantities of both this trip. --Fr. Ross Tozzi



*Fr. Ross Tozzi poses in front of the village of Little Diomed.*

*"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 Chad W. Zielinski*