



The Alaskan Shepherd



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Special Seminarian Issue

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Some give by going to the Missions

Some go by giving to the Missions

Without both there are no Missions



Here I am, Lord.

A Letter From Bishop Zielinski

Dear Friends in Christ,

On June 8, 2021, I celebrate the anniversary of my priestly ordination. I am profoundly humbled to have had the honor to serve Christ and the good people of God, in a variety of locations, these past 25 years.

As with many priests, we are often asked this question: Who or what influenced your decision to become a priest?

I always acknowledge the grace and presence of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of our Blessed Mother.

Additionally, I truly believe that another powerful influence on my vocation is owed in particular to the support and prayers that have always surrounded me from my parents, grandparents, and family members.

As St. Paul says, "...for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will."

(Romans 8:26-27)

I was blessed to be raised in a family that kept the Catholic faith as

an integral part of daily life. Like many families, we faced the challenges of human weakness on the path to our call to holiness. Yet, I often witnessed my parent's and grandparent's constant example of service within our parish and community through their participation in liturgical ministries, catechesis and in their outreach to the poor and the marginalized.

My fraternal grandmother, "Grandma Z" as we called her, lived with our family from the time I was 9 years of age. Her apartment had many religious images: Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. Joseph, Infant of Prague, and many others. I think every table

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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.

or nightstand had a rosary on it and a lengthy list of people to remember in prayer. My grandmother lost her husband when my father was only 14; she had a strong reliance on God's grace. We would often go to her with an overwhelming challenge and without hesitation, she always knew that God could handle it. I am confident that she prayed me through my time in seminary.

My maternal grandparents came from a Scottish Presbyterian background. They too were devout in the practice of their faith and very involved in their church. During my seminary years and ordained years, these grandparents were also supportive of my vocation. I truly see the varied denominations of my family as a powerful influence that greatly assisted me in my time in the United States Air Force where I served among chaplains of varied faith groups. That experience has been helpful too as a bishop where I often serve in various ecumenical settings.

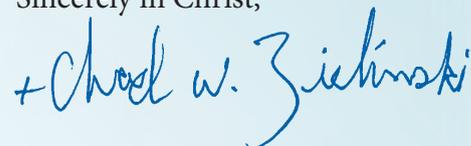
Every priest or religious I talk to can identify an elder in their life that has significantly influenced their vocational discernment. I thank God this day for the elders in my home and community, particularly my parents and grandparents, who left a sacred imprint on my path to the priesthood. They inspired God's beauty, goodness, and truth in my life.

During my first year as a priest, I was assigned to work with a man who had already been ordained 25 years. I vividly recall him sharing that the two greatest supports of his vocation were the blessing of his brother priests and the blessing of couples who share a holy, healthy, and happy marriage. I can now attest how critical this type of support is to my own priesthood.

I encourage you to adopt a seminarian, priest or religious and send them your prayers and words of encouragement. I am so thankful to the families and friends who have supported me all these years. I continue to benefit from their sacrifice of prayer and example.

It is through the inspiration of my Grandmother Z (who modeled her faith through her devotion to the saints, praying the rosary, and her lengthy prayer list) and through the many friends who have written to me to share their own devotion of keeping a prayer list that I have developed the practice of keeping index cards to pray for people who have asked for my prayers. It is due to that practice that I enclose a card that I hope will be of use to you in remembering those who have asked for your prayers. Please remember the Diocese of Fairbanks and especially our Missionaries and Seminarians and know that I remember you in a special way every Friday in my Masses.

Sincerely in Christ,



† Most Reverend Chad W. Zielinski
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska
Diocese of Fairbanks

Where do the seminarians attend Seminary?

In the following pages, I share a little about our Seminarians and their own path to the priesthood. We are currently blessed with three seminarians:

Dominik Wojcik, Josh Miller, and Piotr Oprych

who currently attend

SS. Cyril & Methodius Seminary and Mundelein Seminary.



THANK YOU for considering a gift of support to our Seminarian Endowment Fund which will help us fund the education of future priests for the Diocese of Fairbanks.

Please keep our Seminarians in your prayers.

As a Missionary diocese,

we rely greatly on the generosity of our benefactors for our general operations which includes supporting 38 mission parishes, our priests, programs, and staffing. Educating and forming Seminarians is an added financial challenge, but one that will benefit the diocese for years to come. We recognize the need to educate and form these future priests to bring the Mass and Sacraments to the people of northern Alaska, and to support them without sacrificing essential mission parish support and program funding. Your assistance with this need is so greatly appreciated.

Fr. Robert Fath, Josh Miller, Bishop Chad Zielinski, Piotr Oprych and Dominik Wojcik, stand in the "Mary Garden," located on the west side of Sacred Heart Cathedral, in Fairbanks.



As part of that effort,

the Diocese of Fairbanks has built a permanent endowment that can be stewarded and retained for years to come. The income from this endowment will help support the cost of seminarian education in the Diocese of Fairbanks. To date, the endowment has a balance of just over \$2 million, and the interest from that investment will currently support the education of one of our seminarians each year.



At Bishop White Seminary in Spokane, Washington, students participate in an outdoor Lenten Way of the Cross.



During the start of the pandemic in 2020, (from left to right) Josh Miller, Bishop Chad Zielinski, and Fr. Robert Fath, greeted cars on Palm Sunday to distribute blessed and sanitized palms safely through windows.

What is the process for accepting seminarians?

Seminarians are accepted through a lengthy and thorough process conducted by Bishop Chad Zielinski and by our Vocation Director, Fr. Robert Fath. It includes a psychological test, background check, medical evaluation, and multiple conversations to assist men discerning this vocation. Candidates must be practicing Catholics who have completed their sacraments and have a high school diploma. A college degree is preferred.

Bishop Chad Zielinski and Fr. Robert Fath periodically conduct visits to the seminarians to discern progress and offer support. Here Fr. Robert visits Josh Miller at Mundelein Seminary in Chicago, which is located at University of Mary of the Lake.



What expenses are seminarians responsible for paying?

Though many seminarians' families can and do contribute very generously to their personal expenses, most seminarians come from families of very modest incomes. The average cost of educating and forming a seminarian in our diocese is \$45,000 per year. Their expenses include everything from tuition, room and board to books, stipends, and health insurance.

At Sacred Heart Cathedral, in Fairbanks on January 1, 2021, the Diocese joyfully celebrated two Ordinations to the Transitional Diaconate – those of Dominik Wojcik and Piotr Oprych, who are both studying for the priesthood at Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Orchard Lake, Michigan.



How do we promote new vocations in the Diocese of Fairbanks?

We strive to make personal contact with potential candidates in multiple ways, including in-person, by phone, via email and through social media. Bishop Chad and Fr. Robert visit schools, parishes, and campus ministries to talk about vocations. The best advocates for promoting vocations are parents.



Josh Miller, Dominik Wojcik, and Piotr Oprych head back to their seminaries from the Fairbanks International Airport.

Prayer for Seminarians

O Lord Jesus Christ, great High Priest,
I pray that You call many worthy souls to Your holy priesthood.
Enlighten the Bishop in the choice of candidates, the Spiritual Director
in molding them, and the professors in instructing them.

Lead the seminarians daily in Your unerring footsteps;
so that they may become priests who are models of purity,
possessors of wisdom and heroes of sacrifice;
steeped in humility and aflame with love for God and man;
apostles of Your glory and sanctifiers of souls.

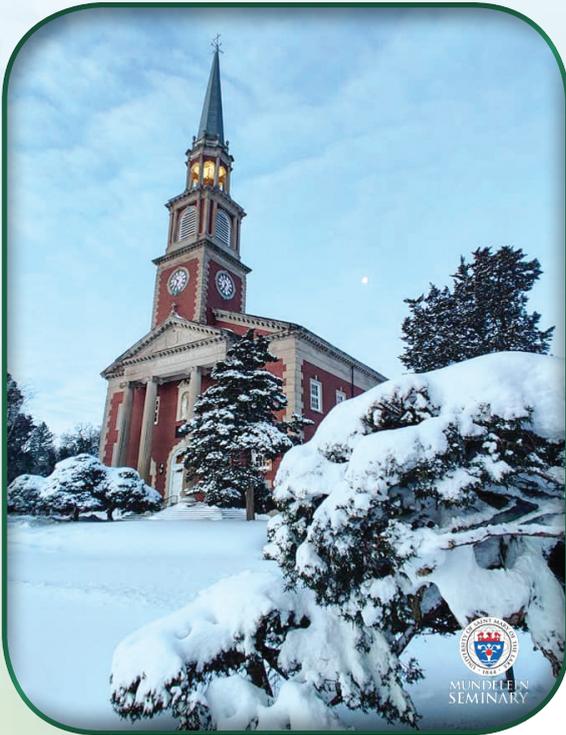
Amen.

(The Pontifical North American College).



Dominik Wojcik prepares to travel via snowmachine, which is the most common way to visit parishioners during the winter in the Alaskan villages.

Mundelein Seminary



Located at University of Mary of the Lake, **Mundelein Seminary** has been the major seminary and school of theology for the Archdiocese of Chicago and beyond for nearly a century. Located just north of Chicago, it is home to 150 seminarians from 30 dioceses across the country and around the world. Solidly grounded in prayer, pastoral formation and rigorous academic training, Mundelein Seminary's distinctive curriculum includes an innovative Teaching Parish Program, two full-time internships, and a study-pilgrimage to the Holy Land. **Josh Miller** currently attends Mundelein Seminary. This summer, Josh will participate in the Institute for Priestly Formation program in Omaha, NE, before returning to Fairbanks for his pastoral year. His education expenses are shared by the Archdiocese for the Military Services and the Diocese of Fairbanks.

*Josh Miller and Vocation Director,
Fr. Robert Fath, at Mundelein.*



Josh Miller speaks to the youth about vocations on the Diocese of Fairbanks campus.



SS. Cyril & Methodius Seminary



SS. Cyril & Methodius Seminary is located in Orchard Lake, Michigan. The Seminary, founded by Father Józef Dąbrowski in 1885, is the first seminary in the State of Michigan and the only one in the United States dedicated to preparing foreign-born seminarians, primarily from Poland, to serve the Catholic Church in our country. They currently offer four degree programs: Master of Divinity, Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry, Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry with a Specialization in Catechetics, and a Master of Arts in Theology. **Dominik Wojcik** and **Piotr Oprych** both attend SS. Cyril & Methodius Seminary, were ordained to the transitional diaconate on January 1, 2021, and will be ordained to the priesthood in the next year.



Deacon Dominik Wojcik



Deacon Piotr Oprych



On the occasion of their ordination to the Transitional Diaconate, Piotr and Dominik received a special cake of celebration from the Polish community in the Orchard Lake area.

Bishop White Seminary



Graduates of Bishop White Seminary have been sent on to study at the following theologates:

- St. Patrick's Seminary & University (Menlo Park, CA)
- Theological College/Catholic University of America (Washington, DC)
- Mount Angel Seminary (St. Benedict, OR)
- Pontifical North American College (Rome)
- St. Paul Seminary (St. Paul, MN)

Bishop White Seminary is a College Seminary at Gonzaga University in Spokane, WA. Seminarian applicants for Bishop White Seminary apply first to a Diocese for sponsorship and then to the Seminarian College Program directly from their high school. High school, non-degree candidates would be encouraged to attend Bishop White Seminary before continuing their seminarian training at another theologate.

Mount Angel Seminary



Since 1889, **Mount Angel Seminary** has sent thousands of priests to serve more than 11 million Catholics in nearly 100 dioceses and religious communities around the world. As the oldest seminary in the western United States, Mount Angel is the only seminary in the West that offers a College of Liberal Arts, a Graduate School of Theology, and a Doctor of Ministry degree program. Our two Diocesan Priests, *Fr. Ross Tozzi and Fr. Robert Fath are both graduates of Mount Angel Seminary; Bishop Zielinski studied there as well.*

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If you are *not* currently receiving our newsletter, *The Alaskan Shepherd*, we would love to send it to you. Each issue contains articles that help you connect with our Missions and Missionaries and most feature a telling of my visits to one or more of our parishes located in bush Alaska—which can only be reached by air.

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