



# neighbors

SPRING 2007

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

# WILDERNESS MISSION

By Effie Caldarola

The thermometer read 35 degrees below zero, but the wind chill made it feel like a crisp minus-50.

Fr. Scott Garrett, pastor of Holy Rosary Parish in the fishing hub of Dillingham on Alaska's southwestern coast, was disappointed. He had hoped to fly his single engine Cherokee Warrior II to King Salmon, where he offers Mass, catechism classes, and sacramental preparation at St. Theresa's Mission in Naknek.

But the overcast skies and the cold air mass that had held Bristol Bay in its frigid grip for several days made him opt for prudence. "It's so frustrating," said the 48-year-old priest, who serves what is unofficially the largest parish in the world, geographically speaking. "I know Catholic families in Naknek want

to see me. If it were only 20 below, I'd fly. But I can't take any chances."

Local people throughout this sprawling 33,000-square-mile mission fondly remember the last pastor, Fr. Jim Kelley, who died when the plane he was piloting to a remote village crashed on Palm Sunday a few years ago. Being a priest in rural Alaska is not easy, since so many obstacles hamper travel. These priests and their co-workers—deacons, religious women, and local lay leaders—routinely face snow storms, heavy fog, high winds, and flooding rains.

Of the 29 parishes in the Archdiocese of Anchorage, 21 are located in rural parts of the state, some of them accessible only by plane or boat. Only 7 of the 21

have a resident priest. Using his pilot skills to serve the mission church, Fr. Garrett flies to places with names like Clarks Point, Egegik, Igiugig, and Chignik Bay.

"All the villages have gravel strips for landing, some of them very short," he remarked. "And when I near a village, I call on a VHF marine radio to have someone meet me at the airstrip. Cell phones just won't work up here."

At some of these remote missions, Fr. Garrett may find one lone Catholic yearning for the sacraments. The village school teachers may be Catholic; families working in canneries may come for Mass. Many Catholics are Alaska Natives, particularly in Clarks

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## FROM THE CHAIRMAN

SPRING 2007



### DEAR FRIENDS,

The Diocese of Juneau covers more than 37,500 square miles, much of which is composed of inland waters of the Pacific Ocean. The land area is made up almost entirely of islands; there are no roads among any of our communities. Either we fly from place to place or we utilize the state ferry system. And given the climate and geography of southeast Alaska, it isn't always easy to get around. One of the most common phrases heard when scheduling events is "weather permitting."

One of the great joys of being the bishop of Juneau is the opportunity for "hands-on" pastoral ministry. Besides myself, there are only nine priests serving in the diocese. Each priest must assume many responsibilities, which include sharing ministry in mission locations. I try to fly to the village of Yakutat each month to celebrate Mass for the people. Though the Catholic population is relatively small, the people of Yakutat have needs as great as those of folks in a large city parish in one of the lower 48 states. In addition to being there for Mass and confessions, I visit homebound parishioners and celebrate sacramental anointing with those who are seriously ill. I also just visit with parishioners and people in the community. Sometimes I attend high-school basketball games or community gatherings. Moreover, priests in southeast Alaska are here not only for the Catholics. Some 60% of the population is unaffiliated with any religion, so we have a responsibility to reach out to all people.

In southeast Alaska, as well as in other communities throughout Alaska, the missions are served by a dedicated group. Besides the priests, there are a number of women religious, permanent deacons, and full-time lay ministers. Those who minister are integral members of the communities in which they serve. Catholics and other people of faith, as well as those people without demonstrable faith, depend greatly on our ministry. People regularly turn to our priests and pastoral ministers, whether to seek comfort during a moment of tragedy or to share an occasion of joy.

The Catholic Home Missions Appeal is taken up in parishes around the country on the fourth weekend in April. This year, look for our poster, which proclaims "Sharing One Faith: Catholic Missions in America." On the surface, the Church in Juneau has little in common with the Church in New York or Chicago. Our parishes may have 200 members rather than 2,000. But look just a little beneath the surface, and you will see one faith being proclaimed in a spirit of service. One faith, one Catholic Church, in little missions and more established parishes across the United States!

† Most Rev. Michael W. Warfel  
Bishop of Juneau  
Chairman, Committee on the Home Missions



Alaska is by far our nation's largest state, covering over 663,000 square miles. If the map of Alaska is overlaid on a map of the contiguous 48 states, it would stretch from coast to coast. Alaska's capital city, Juneau, is only accessible by ship or air—no roads connect it to the rest of the state.

Alaska was purchased from Russia for only \$7,200,000 in 1867. Alaska became the 49th state in 1959. It has the largest percentage (15.6%) of American Indians of any state. More than 90 languages are spoken throughout Alaska.

Originally laid out as a railroad construction port for the Alaska Railroad, the city of Anchorage receives over 95% of all freight entering Alaska. On average, Anchorage has around 75 inches of snow each year.

A product of the Gold Rush in the 1890s, Fairbanks enjoys more than 20 hours of daylight every day from mid-May through July. Today, the Fort Knox hard-rock gold mine produces 1,200 ounces daily.

Juneau is home to the state's top attraction, Mendenhall Glacier. Its impressive face is roughly 100 feet high, a mile and a half wide, and six miles in length. While the eerie blue-white glaciers of the Juneau Icefield appear to be still, they are in fact flowing downhill out of the high mountains like rivers in slow motion.

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Photos: p. 3 top, Archdiocese of Anchorage; p. 6, Diocese of Fairbanks; p. 7 top, Archdiocese of Anchorage; all other photos by David Suley, CHM.

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Point, where most of the population is Yu'pik Eskimo, and in Dillingham, where three out of every five people have Native blood.

Fr. Garrett flies his grueling rounds to serve individuals and families whose little churches may not host a priest for months on end. "I'm trying to meet all the people in my small villages who have deep roots in the Church, but who may have strayed because they don't have access to the sacraments, the catechesis, and the opportunities for counseling that so many urban Catholics take for granted."

With constant travel, maintaining his bush plane, refurbishing Dillingham's neglected rectory, and endless snow shoveling, Fr. Garrett has plenty to keep him busy. A spiritual descendent of the



pioneer priests who mused from village to village by dogsled, Father is on the trail in Mission America.

*Effie Caldarola is a staff writer for the Catholic Anchor newspaper and a syndicated columnist for Catholic News Service.*

## RECOLLECTIONS OF A PRIEST PILOT

**“**When I first arrived in western Alaska, I experienced the land as empty and dangerous. The only places where I felt safe were in the villages and towns, where there were plenty of people and plenty of shelter. The tundra had no roads and no places to land my small plane in case of emergency. There were no houses for shelter and no places to find food. It took a few years to learn that the Natives of western Alaska had long lived on the same land I found empty and dangerous. One time, while flying one of the deacons to

Tununak, I watched his face as he looked at the tundra below us. His eyes looked with love upon a land that had given him and his family life for so long. There was no fear of the land such as I had experienced. Slowly, I came to realize that he did not think of the land as belonging to him, but of himself as belonging to the land.”

Fr. Richard Case, SJ  
Pastoral Coordinator for Eight Village Missions  
Galena, Alaska  
Diocese of Fairbanks

# THE ALASKA

**\$450,000**  
**for Mission Church in Alaska**  
*for* **2007**



“OUR DIOCESE IS STRUNG OUT ALONG PENINSULAS, AND FJORDS. MOST CATHOLIC MISSIONS ARE ACCESSIBLE ONLY BY AIR OR SEA. OUR MISSIONS, OFTEN WITH ONLY FEW CATHOLICS, MUST BE SERVED BY BUSH PLANE.”

# A MISSIONS

## Archdiocese of Anchorage

- 138,985 square miles
- 32,170 Catholics (8% of total population)
- 29 parishes/missions (21 in rural areas, most accessible only by bush plane or boat)
- 14 parishes/missions have resident priests
- Parishes/missions range in size from 60 to 900 families
- 17 diocesan priests/10 religious priests

CHM funding: \$150,000 (in 2007)

### Pastoral programs funded:

- Mission parishes
- Faith formation/evangelization
- Communications
- Hispanic ministry

## Diocese of Juneau

- 37,500 square miles
- 5,500 Catholics (7% of total population)
- 11 parishes/missions (most accessible only by bush plane or boat)
- 7 parishes/missions have a resident priest
- Parishes/missions range in size from 10 to 2,000 people
- 6 diocesan priests/2 religious priests

CHM funding: \$150,000 (in 2007)

### Pastoral programs funded:

- Evangelization
- Mission parishes
- Youth ministry
- Family ministries
- Deacon formation

## Diocese of Fairbanks

- 409,849 square miles
- 18,600 Catholics (8% of total population)
- 40 parishes/6 missions (31 in rural areas, all accessible only by bush plane)
- 17 parishes/missions have a resident priest
- Parishes/missions range in size from 200 to 2,000 people
- 13 diocesan priests/12 religious priests

CHM funding: \$150,000 (in 2007)

### Pastoral programs funded:

- Native American ministry
- Mission parishes
- Rural deacon training
- Adult faith formation
- Religious education
- Lay ministry training

ONG 500 MILES OF ISLANDS,  
T OF OUR 11 PARISHES ARE  
A. THE SMALLER VILLAGE  
FOUR OR FIVE FAMILIES,  
NES OR LOCAL FERRIES.”

—BISHOP MICHAEL WARFEL  
DIOCESE OF JUNEAU, ALASKA





## ESKIMO VILLAGES ON THE YUKON

Sr. Kathy Radich, OSF, labors tirelessly on behalf of the people of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and the missionaries who serve them. She has committed her life to preserving the culture of Native peoples while helping them to assume responsibility for their Church—the Catholic Church. Through hard work, solid communication, and travel in harsh and often dangerous conditions, she has become known and loved in all of the 20 villages she visits.

Sr. Kathy reflects upon her many years in service to the Mission Church in Alaska in her own words: “My time here among the Yup’ik people has been greatly blessed. I find the Yup’iks to be very much rooted in the same values that Francis of Assisi lived and preached. As a follower of Francis, I have found that the way the Yup’iks live out their values of simplicity, love and respect for creation, joy, and humility has been a wonderful witness and challenge. As I travel and spend time with the people of the villages, my prayer is that they also receive Francis’ deep-rooted belief in the love God has for each person and for themselves personally.”

Sr. Kathy Radich, OSF  
Pastoral Coordinator of Rural Ministries of  
Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Region  
Diocese of Fairbanks

*CHM is grateful to The Alaskan Shepherd, the newspaper of the Diocese of Fairbanks, for its assistance with this article.*

## SUPPORT THE MISSION CHURCH HERE IN AMERICA

**Catholic Home Missions Appeal  
April 28-29, 2007**

Taken up in most parishes on the weekend of April 28-29, 2007, the Catholic Home Missions Appeal (CHMA) provides a wonderful opportunity for Catholics in our own country to help one another.

Catholics in Mission America—Alaska, Appalachia, the Deep South, the Southwest, the Mountain West, and the young dioceses of the Caribbean and the Pacific—face major challenges in living their faith. The missions have few priests, few or no Catholic schools, difficult travel conditions, poor economic environments, and limited financial resources. Catholics often constitute a small minority within a larger population. Their pastoral and financial needs are many.

Ninety dioceses and Eastern Catholic eparchies in the United States cannot provide basic pastoral services for their people without support from the Secretariat for Home Missions.

CHMA enables Catholic parishes in poor communities to keep their doors open and to provide Mass, sacraments, and religious education for children and adults.

**Please give generously to the 2007 Catholic Home Missions Appeal to support fellow Catholics here in America. Thank you so much!**

**NEW WEB SITE!**



[WWW.USCCB.ORG/HM](http://WWW.USCCB.ORG/HM)

The Committee on the Home Missions has a new Web site that features an **interactive map** of Mission Territory USA. Click on any Mission Diocese for contact information. Click on selected dioceses for stories and pictures to make Mission America come alive!

## A PIPELINE AND GOD

“The parish here in Valdez is absolutely phenomenal!” said Sr. Marie Ann Brent. “The people have taken ownership. If I am unable to lead the service and there is not a priest coming that day, the people form a team and take over. They are using their gifts to keep the parish alive, keeping it vital and prayerful.”

Years ago, Sr. Marie Ann moved to Valdez, the southern terminus of the Alaska Pipeline, where she currently serves as the administrator of St. Francis Xavier Parish. About 115 families make up the parish, representing widely varied national and racial backgrounds including Vietnamese, Filipino, Thai, and Indonesian. “For a parish of our size, we have a lively congregation with many young families,” said Sr. Marie Ann.

Even with very active parishioners, she has her plate full. She offers pastoral counseling, organizes



liturgical ministries, and works on the finance council. When a priest is able to

come to Valdez, she makes all advance preparations for the visit.

“The archbishop has always seen that we have a priest for at least a week at Christmas and during Holy Week and Easter,” said Sr. Marie Ann. “The folks are extremely hospitable, making sure the visiting priest feels welcome and is well fed!”

The threat of bad weather is more than an inconvenience in Valdez. When storms prevent bush planes from landing, the parish can be without a priest for months. “The people really appreciate a priest when they finally see one!”

Sr. Marie Ann Brent  
Parish Administrator  
St. Francis Xavier Parish  
Valdez, Alaska  
Archdiocese of Anchorage

*CHM is grateful to Crosswinds, the Archdiocese of Anchorage's quarterly newsletter, for its assistance with this article.*

“SEVEN OF OUR MORE RURAL MISSIONS ARE WELL SERVED BY PASTORAL ADMINISTRATORS WHO ARE RELIGIOUS WOMEN OR LAY PEOPLE. FAITH COMMUNITIES WITHOUT A RESIDENT PRIEST HOST A CIRCUIT PRIEST USUALLY TWICE A MONTH. THESE TRAVELING PRIESTS OFTEN FLY INTO SMALL TOWNS AND VILLAGES TO BRING MASS AND THE SACRAMENTS, BUT ONLY WHEN WEATHER CONDITIONS PERMIT.”

—ARCHBISHOP ROGER SCHWIETZ, OMI  
ARCHDIOCESE OF ANCHORAGE, ALASKA





# neighbors

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## • COMMITTEE ON THE HOME MISSIONS • **Who Are We?**

**T**he bishops' Committee on the Home Missions was founded as the American Board of Catholic Missions in 1924. In cooperation with the Black and Indian Missions Board (1885) and the Catholic Church Extension Society (1905), the Committee provides financial support for missionary activities that strengthen and extend the presence of the Church in the United States and its island territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific. The principal beneficiaries of the annual Catholic Home Missions Appeal are approximately 90 home mission dioceses, which include the Eastern Catholic Church eparchies.

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HERE IN AMERICA**

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April 28-29, 2007**