



# The Alaskan Shepherd



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*Some give by going to the Missions*

*Some go by giving to the Missions*

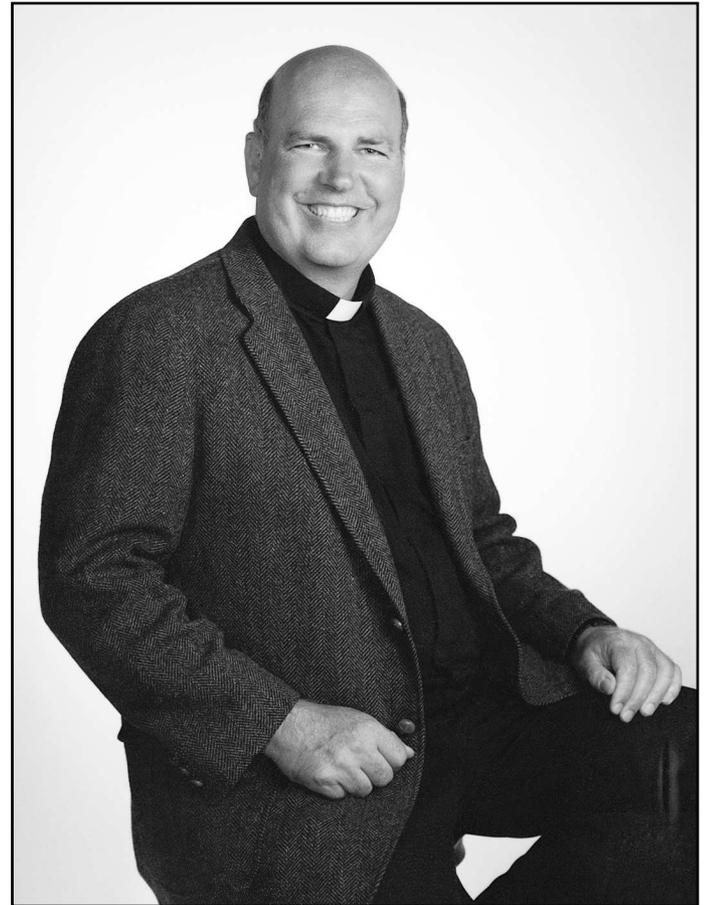
*Without both there are no Missions*

## **“HOLDING DOWN THE FORT,” WHILE THE DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS AWAITS A NEW BISHOP: FATHER RICHARD D. CASE, S.J.**

Both on the Feast of the Transfiguration, the day of the death of our beloved Bishop Michael J. Kaniecki, S.J., and on the day of his burial, Fairbanks witnessed awe-inspiring rainbows. As one hopes to find a “pot of gold” at the end of all rainbows, we were fortunate enough to find our own promise of hope: Father Richard D. Case, S.J. As Lucy Dalsky, Chancery staff member voiced, “After the bishop’s death we felt truly orphaned, but Father Case brought a sense of tranquility, peace, and unity that soon convinced everyone he was the ideal savior in the middle of tragedy.” So he was, so he is.

Father Case is a striking, but tranquil, presence at the Diocese of Fairbanks Chancery. Upon his appointment, he told the press that he sees his role as Administrator primarily as a caretaker. “My job”, he said, “is to keep out of the way of good people and let them do their work.” Immersed in the position of Diocesan Administrator, primarily with the duty and responsibility of carrying on the late bishop’s wishes until a new bishop is appointed, Father Case shines. When Father Case is “IN,” the entire staff benefits from his upbeat and positive character. He often “stops by” a department on the pretense of looking for a snack. By the time he leaves, usually singing and laughing, the employees are sure of his sensitivity and concern for each one of them. With his self-possessed gentle guidance, the diocese operates more like a family than a business—always mindful of our true mission in Christ.

Born in Seattle, Washington, Father Case lived his early years in Washington Park. He attended St.

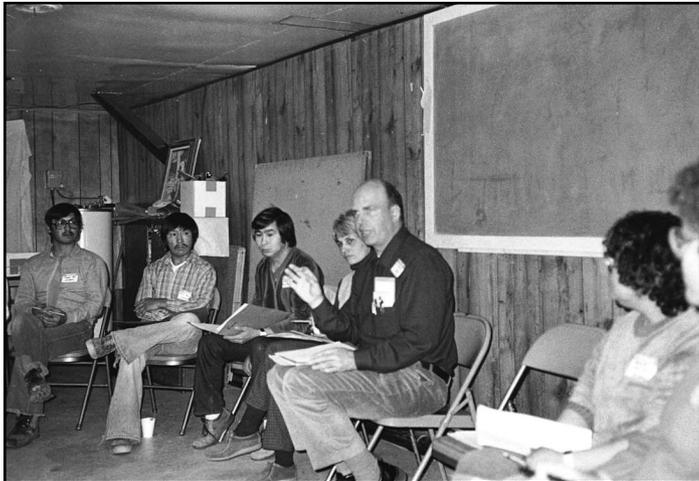


Joseph’s grade school and Seattle Prep. He also attended the University of Washington and Seattle University. He majored in business and economics, and qualified as a flight instructor, teaching flying at Renton Airport for two years. From June to August of 1963, starting and ending in Seattle, he made a complete trip around the world. On this 80-

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1312 PEGER ROAD  
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709-5199

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day trip he visited Japan, Southeast Asia, India, Africa, South and Central America. In September of that same year, at the age of 21, he moved to Sheridan, Oregon, to enter the Society of Jesus, a Society his brother Frank had entered just seven years earlier. In June of 1966, he flew to St. Louis, Missouri, for studies in philosophy and economics.



In Nome, Alaska, on September 22, 1984, Father Case chairs a Diocesan Planning meeting. (Photo by Father Louis L. Renner, S.J.)

After earning a MA in economics at St. Louis University, Father Case returned to Gonzaga University, in Spokane, to complete the requirements for a Washington State teacher's certificate. In 1969, he began a three-year assignment of teaching Social Studies and Mathematics at Gonzaga Prep, after which he flew across the Atlantic to Amsterdam in the Netherlands for theological studies. In June, 1975, Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen, in St. James Cathedral in Seattle, ordained him to the priesthood. After a summer as chaplain at Providence Hospital in Seattle, Father Case returned to Gonzaga Prep to teach religion and to work in the campus ministry program.

Finding himself in Fairbanks—a city of only around 30,000—Father Case recalls:

*Fairbanks seemed a bit isolated and wild. Just over the hills, in any direction, was open tundra with no roads and no population. Quite frankly, the vastness of the state frightened me a little.*

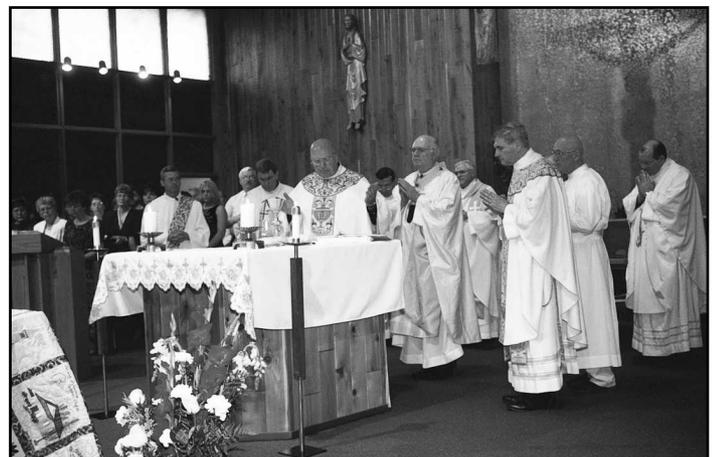
After several weeks, Father Case joined Father Jim Sebesta, a preminent Jesuit pilot, on a flight to some of the bush missions. This experience sparked

in him a love of Alaska and its people that is evident today. In 1976, the Jesuit provincial assigned Father Case to Alaska for an indefinite period. After studying the Eskimo language for a year, he moved to the bush villages of Chevak and Newtok for two years. He then returned to Spokane for his final period of training in the Jesuits. Upon his return to Alaska, the Jesuit superior assigned him to the villages of Tununak, Toksook Bay, and Nightmute, where he served as pastor for five years. He then moved to Bethel for one year and St. Mary's for two years.

In 1983-84 Father Case was appointed to head up a special Diocesan Planning Task Force, composed of Sisters Pauline Igoe and Eileen Brown, and Carolyn Winters, Ruth Wyatt and himself. The philosophy and inspiration behind the whole planning process was proclaimed and summarized in this Statement of Purpose:

*Guided by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and dependent upon the Holy Spirit, the church of Northern Alaska exists to proclaim the Good News. Being people of unique and diverse cultures, it is our blessing and our challenge to seek wholeness and unity with all people. As sisters and brothers, we create a community of believers in which we give witness by our ministry to each other so as to make known the presence of the Risen Lord in our lives.*

The experience and respect that Father Case gained during his time as Chairman of the Diocesan Planning Task Force was perhaps essential in his



Father Case and concelebrants at the Mass of Christian Burial for Bishop Kaniecki in Sacred Heart Cathedral, Fairbanks, on August 12, 2000. (Photo by Brother Charles P. McBride, C.S.C)

**We want to thank in a special way those of you who have included the Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska (our legal title) in your bequests and wills, and those of you who, at the time of the deaths of dear ones, have suggested that in their memory contributions be made to the Missions of Northern Alaska or to the Alaskan Shepherd Endowment Fund.**

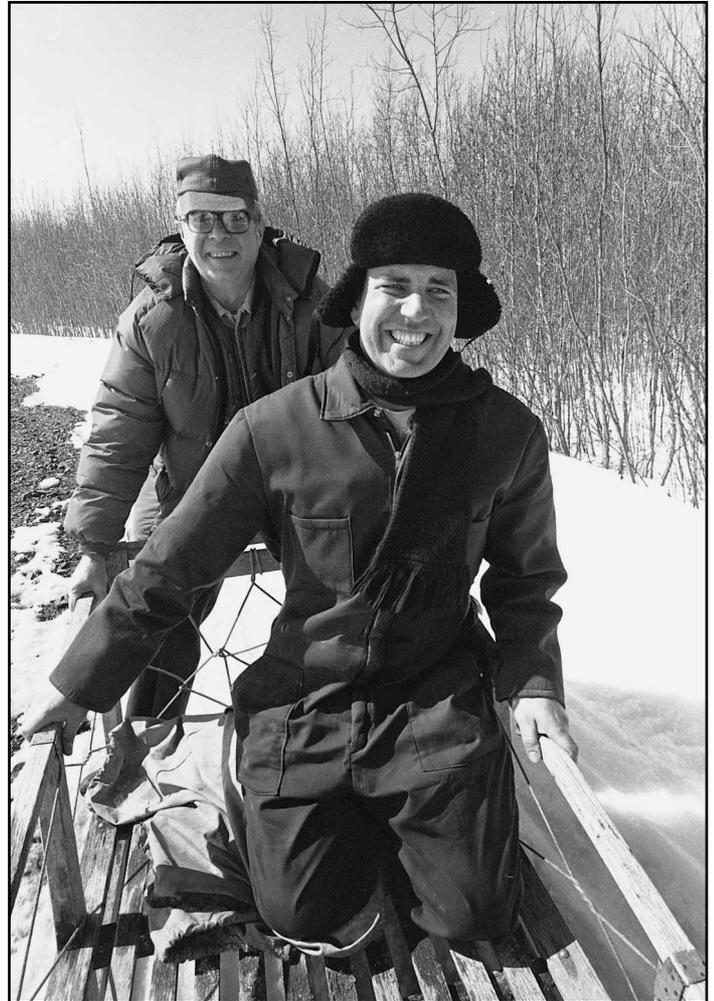
being chosen by a majority of the Diocesan consultants for the position of Diocesan Administrator. Hear it told by Father Patrick Bergquist, one of the consultants:

*I recall arriving home one evening, actually early morning at about 1AM and checking my answering machine. There I heard a somewhat urgent message from Archbishop Hurley who, as "Metropolitan Bishop," assumed authority and responsibility of the Fairbanks diocese following Bishop Kaniecki's unexpected death. The Archbishop asked that I call him upon receiving the message—day or night. Being it was so early, I hesitated, but called anyway, rather apologetically. Archbishop Hurley thanked me for calling and said, — 'Pat, Father Case is leaving from St. Mary's and traveling to Emmonak to pick up Mike's plane. When he arrives in Fairbanks, you have eight days to pull the consultants together and choose a diocesan administrator— or I will do it for you! Needless to say, the consultants were gathered and the process of choosing someone to "hold down the fort" began.*

The seven diocesan consultants, all bishop appointed, began their meeting by hearing Canon Law on the subject of a Diocesan Administrator and the qualities he should possess. All priests of the diocese were potential candidates. Once the meeting started, the consultants began listing the priests of the diocese, eliminating some due to their nearing retirement and others due to their recent ordination. After some time each consultant was told to come up with three names and a vote would be taken. Father Bergquist distinctly remembers a great feeling of the Holy Spirit's presence in the room with them all that day. The consultants were intensely aware that the entire diocese, along with the Chancery staff, still grieving the loss of their dear Bishop Kaniecki, were praying for them and with them. Father Bergquist knew they were doing the will of God, when they chose Father Richard D. Case, S.J., by a majority vote to be Diocesan Administrator for the Diocese of Fairbanks.

Father Case soon had the respect, admiration and confidence of his fellow Jesuits and of the diocesan priests. Overnight the Chancery staff warmed to his good-natured and approachable demeanor. Father's weekly homilies are both edifying and upbeat, and always encourage the daily living of the gospel.

There is a contentment and pride in his chosen vocation that radiates out to those he touches.



*Fathers Case and Richard McCaffrey, S.J.—on their way from the airstrip to the village of Holy Cross—ride the sled being pulled by Bishop Kaniecki driving the snowmachine. (Photo by Father Don Doll, S.J.)*

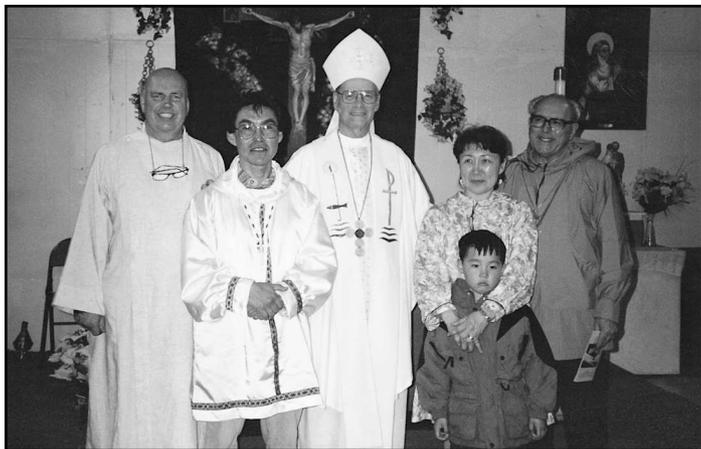
Father Case explains his fervor for Alaska and its people:

*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 in case of an 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*

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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 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.

Prior to his appointment as Administrator, Father Case headed the Diocesan Eskimo Deacon Program—based in the village of St. Mary's on the Andreafsky River—and worked closely with Bishop Kaniecki. His primary responsibility was the ongoing training and developing of the deacons and deacon candidates.



On June 7, 1997, newly ordained Eskimo Deacon Joe Avugiak, with wife Margaret and son, poses with Bishop Kaniecki and Fathers Case and René Astruc, S.J., in St. Catherine's Church, Chefornek, in western Alaska. (Photo courtesy of Father Case)

On October 23, 2001, Bishop Michael W. Warfel, Bishop of the Juneau diocese, was appointed Apostolic Administrator for the Diocese of Fairbanks. He asked Father Case to continue the day-to-day administration of the diocese as his assistant, with the authority and power equivalent to a Vicar General. As to why this change was made, neither Bishop Warfel nor Father Case have a clear answer. It does seem to mean that we do not know, when a new Bishop will be appointed for the diocese. In the interim, Father Case, having greater freedom to travel to some of the bush parishes, can now resume some of his former pastoral duties and share the wealth of care that has become his trademark.

In response to the question as to when a new

—Father Louis L. Renner, S.J. /Patricia Walter, Alaskan Shepherd Staff



Father Case in western Alaska with the Cessna 207, a plane flown by him and owned by the Diocese of Fairbanks. (Photo courtesy of Father Case)

bishop will be appointed, Bishop Warfel had this to say:

*My hope and expectation is that a new bishop will be chosen by Summer 2002. While in Washington for the USCCB meeting, I was assured that the process for selecting a candidate is moving forward. There is no way to determine exactly when this may occur, because of all that is involved. Ultimately it depends on a candidate's saying 'yes' to the request to serve as bishop.*

It is hard to imagine the thoughts that raced through Father Case's mind, as he winged his way toward Fairbanks in the bishop's Cessna 207 on August 9, 2000. I am sure that instead of his usual good humor, there was most probably a solemn sadness and stunned sense of disbelief at the passing of such a dear friend and pastoral leader as Bishop Kaniecki. Father Case could not have known, as he maneuvered the plane, that he would also assume the responsibilities and administration of the diocese. Bishop Kaniecki would indeed be proud of the man, the priest, the leader, who assumed the responsibility of a diocese so admirably.

Father Richard D. Case, S.J., is our light in the darkness, gracefully "holding down the fort," and calmly leading the diocese with strength and compassion along the road of its mission. We are blessed.

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Diocesan Home Page:  
<http://www.cbna.info>

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