Missionary Disciples
to the People of Northern and Western Alaska

Diocese of Fairbanks - September 2019 - Volume 24 Number 4

Inside:
Hot Wheels™ Donor
Chancery Staff Changes
FOCUS Group in Fairbanks
Message from Bishop Chad
Petoskey Group Return to Y-K Region
“Missionary Disciples” is a publication of the Catholic Diocese of Fairbanks that serves northern and western Alaska. Its purpose is to provide a regular opportunity for all ministries throughout the Diocese to share information so our tremendous diversity may enrich our common mission of service to the people of our Diocese.

If you have questions or suggestions, please contact David Schienle at the Chancery at (907) 374-9500 or library@cbna.org.

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Cover photo:
Group photo of volunteers from Petoskey, MI, in front of Sacred Heart Church in Emmonak, AK.

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Diocesan Magazine - Content

3 Thanks Be To God
Bp. Chad Zielinski

7 Faith and Family Formation
Fred Villa

9 Staff Changes

11 Hot Wheels Donor
Sr. Kathy Radich

12 FOCUS in Fairbanks
Matt Leffel

13 Building Up the Church
Patrick Tam

17 Theo-drama vs. Ego-Drama
Fr. Tom Kuffel

18 Spiritual Formation Days
Fr. Tom Kuffel

19 Interment of Fr. John Martinek
David Schienle
During my travels throughout the diocese, I hear people say, “Bishop please thank the people who support us in our mission work in Alaska. We are so blessed and grateful for their generosity.” This prompts me to share with you about some of my recent travels in the lower 48 states, where I raise funds for our diocese during mission appeals. People are so moved when they hear about our work here in the far north and they eagerly want to share what they have received. I always convey your messages of thanks to our benefactors for their generosity and hope to give you some insight into the people who support our work in Alaska.

Bishop Chad Zielinski
Soon after being appointed Bishop of Fairbanks, I realized just how large the diocese is and that serving my people would require more than the average travel for a bishop. After all, 75% of our churches are in remote villages. What I didn’t count on was the frequent travel to the lower 48 states. The Diocese of Fairbanks is still a missionary diocese and more than 90% of our funding comes from outside Alaska. Most donations come from a large base of supporters who learn about our work through The Alaskan Shepherd newsletter, receiving it in the mail several times a year as I did during my childhood.

To augment their generous donations, I join the long line of previous Fairbanks bishops, priests, and religious who have traveled to parishes in the lower 48 to raise money through mission appeals. Our current Mission Appeals Coordinator, Deacon Les Maiman, does an exceptional job coordinating these visits for me and others in our diocese.

When visiting a church in the lower 48, I will typically preach at all weekend Masses, and concelebrate for at least three. Some of these parishes are huge and I have preached up to nine Masses in one weekend, including some in Spanish. I begin by expounding on the readings, then transition into our mission work in northern Alaska. Parishioners always hear that our diocese is nearly 410,000 square miles, which they really get once I scale it for them at 2.5 times the size of California, nearly twice the size of Texas, and five times the size of Minnesota! I see a lot of jaws drop at that point. Their amazement only intensifies when I explain that we have 46 parishes and I can only drive to nine of them because you need a plane, boat, snowmachine, or ATV to reach the rest. It then becomes apparent just how geographically unique our vast diocese is.

I also share a brief history of how the Catholic faith came to Alaska through the Jesuit missionaries in the late 1800s, which continues today through our missionary priests and religious, a third of whom are over 60. I describe how our clergy and religious move from village to village using boats in summer, then use snowmachines and ATVs on these same icy “highways” during winter. Many of our missionaries live in subarctic villages with no running water. Out of love for their brothers and sisters, these men and women endure privations that few of us can imagine to share the Gospel.

Finally, I share about the unique culture of our Native villages and how these Yup’ik, Athabaskan, Google map of all parishes in the Diocese. Green icons are parishes on the highway system. Orange icons mark the rural parishes. 90% Funding comes from outside Alaska
and Inupiat Catholics still hunt, fish, and gather from the land to survive, just as their ancestors did for thousands of years. And sometimes, I am privileged to participate in their seasonal subsistence activities and get to hunt and fish with them. There is something special about sharing a potluck with these Native Catholics, who gift me with the fruits of the land and sea they have harvested themselves: moose, caribou, bear, musk ox, whale, seal, walrus, salmon, geese, and berries, finished off with a cup of “tundra tea.” Native Alaskans are blessed with a profound poverty of spirit and are always deeply grateful that God provides for all their needs. In fact, one of the most common words I hear in villages is Quyana or “Thank you” in Yup’ik.

As fascinating as all this is to people, however, the most impactful moment is when they learn that many of their brothers and sisters in northern Alaska are only able to celebrate the Mass and sacraments about every six to eight weeks due to our handful of clergy and the high cost of travel in bush Alaska. They are surprised to learn that unlike their own parish, which has one to two dedicated pastors, most of our churches must share priests, and rely on trained lay ministers to lead Communion services, religious education and sacramental preparation, and even funeral services when a deacon or priest is unavailable, which is often. For Catholics who usually have a variety of Sunday and even daily Mass times to choose from, it is sobering to consider being deprived of the Mass and sacraments as often as some of our village faithful are.

I conclude the homily by pointing to the altar and reminding them that though we in Alaska are thousands of miles away, we share with them the same Body and Blood of Christ. And that the Eucharist spiritually unites us as brothers and sisters in Christ, a connection that transcends time and space. I promise to offer Mass for their families and ask them to pray for us.

Amazingly, I manage to fit all of this into a 15-20 minute presentation!

Following Mass, Deacon Les and I have the opportunity to visit with people. At every parish, people swarm us with questions and comments about our great state. I am always asked if Alaska really is like it is depicted on the reality TV shows. People tell me about their cruise ship vacations up the inside passageway. Others want to share about their family vacations to Alaska and how the beauty is indelibly etched in their minds as a manifestation of God’s own glory.

Some parishes truly stand out in your mind. This past summer, I visited a church pastored by a German priest in his 80s, who still fluently speaks his native tongue. He described his parish as the “United Nations” and I could see why—parishioners were from Africa, the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, China, Eastern Europe, Indonesia, Mexico, and South America. At that parish and several others, I have heard heroic stories of the faithful escaping intense persecution or political oppression to find refuge in America. These people were especially motivated to financially and spiritually support our work in Alaska because they recognized that we also

Bishop Chad visiting the sick by ATV in Marshall, AK.
share the light of Christ in an extremely challenging environment.

I am always deeply touched when people approach me and ask for a special blessing after Mission Appeal Masses. An elderly mother once asked me to pray over her daughter in her 50s who had just been diagnosed with cancer. Another woman asked for prayers while weeping over her battle with depression. A lonely man talked about the loss of his beloved wife of many years. Parents asked me to pray for their son’s soul, who had died from suicide. Many just ask for a blessing for peace and good health. The requests come from people of all walks of life, from the very poor to the very wealthy. Yet they all seek hope, healing, community support, and most of all, that transcendent and intimate encounter with Christ Himself in the Holy Eucharist.

Despite the diversity of people I meet on my travels, I am always struck by how the whole human family has the same needs, joys, and struggles. Regardless of culture, race, or socioeconomic status, we are all struggling toward heaven and we all need each other. And most of all, we need the mercy of Christ. I am deeply touched by the thankfulness of the people I meet when traveling, who are so heartfelt in their gratitude for the blessings they receive. This is perhaps most beautifully expressed in our sending forth from Mass: “Go in peace glorifying the Lord by your life!” And with a unified voice, the faithful respond, “Thanks be to God.”
Faith and Family Formation

Fred Villa
Coordinator for Faith and Family Formation
Administrator for the Diocesan Safe Environment program

Introducing Fred Villa

Fred Villa has rejoined the Chancery staff, having previously served as Special Assistant to Bishop Donald Kettler in 2005. Fred is serving as the Coordinator for Faith and Family Formation in the Interior Region. Fred will also be Administrator for the Diocesan Safe Environment Program. Fred and his wife Connie have been married for 32 years and have 8 children. They are members of the St. Nicholas Parish in North Pole, AK, and have been involved in religious education, youth ministry, Catholic Engaged Encounter, parish council, and pro-life activities. Fred is a member of the Diocesan Budget Committee, a trustee for the Catholic Trust of Northern Alaska and serves as Grand Knight of the Knights of Columbus Council 8308.

The Office of Faith and Family is guided by Pope Francis’ encyclical Amoris Latitia with a zeal for building the universal church through the domestic church that resides within Christian families.

Fred states, “I hope that you will consider me and the Office of Faith and Family Formation as a resource for your parish and family.”

Religious Education and Safe Environment Update

Catechetical Sunday was September 15th, with religious education programs beginning the 2019-2020 school year. We’ve increased the accessibility to the Safe Environment Training for employees and volunteers by placing a link on the Safe Environment Training - Online Resources page of the Diocese of Fairbanks web site. This small change will make accessing the training program more intuitive and hopefully easier to locate. Now you can go to the diocesan web page and drop-down menu for Safe Environment Online Training Resources www.dioceseoffairbanks.org or type in the web address https://safeandsacred-fairbanks.org to get started.

It is critical for our children and vulnerable adults that church ministers, lay or clergy, understand their roles and responsibilities to provide a safe environment. Religious education teachers, aides, and youth ministers must be properly informed about providing a safe environment by completing their Safe and Sacred training. For questions or additional information call Fred Villa, Coordinator for Faith and Family Formation at (907) 374-9511.
Fairbanks Stands and Prays for 40 Days

Interior Right to Life is announcing the largest pro-life event in Fairbanks’s history! It’s called Fairbanks Stands and Prays for 40 Days.

Fairbanks Stands and Prays for 40 Days is modeled after the programs having the largest impact on abortion in our country and around the world, 40 Days for Life. It’s based on 3 concepts: vigil, prayer, and fasting. We’ll be outside of Planned Parenthood’s abortion clinic at 1867 Airport Way from September 2nd-October 11th, 12 hours a day, from 7 AM-7 PM. We’ll stand there and pray for women to make better choices, for babies to live, and for God to intervene. The fasting can be a full fast or just a fast from social media or anything in between.

Around the world, a prayer like this has saved over 16,000 known lives, helped shutdown 104 abortion clinics and contributed to 190 abortion workers’ resignations. This is the type of program that helped Abby Johnson of the Unplanned movie quit Planned Parenthood.

Sign-ups are needed for the Stand and Pray for 40 Days event. Please consider signing up yourself or coordinating with your various ministries as a group. We need you and your powerful prayers. https://signup.com/go/YPSpayE. Saving lives is only a click away.

Catholic Engaged Encounter

Catholic Engaged Encounter is an in-depth, private, personal, marriage preparation experience within the context of Catholic faith and values. Catholic Engaged Encounter is a weekend retreat with other engaged couples and plenty of time alone together to dialogue honestly and intensively about their prospective lives together including their strengths and weaknesses, desires, ambitions, goals, their attitudes about money, sex, children, family, and their role in the church and in society.

Couples who are preparing for the sacrament of Marriage should speak with their priest for registration information. For more information, you may contact Deacon Sean and Jodi Stack (907) 451-4382 or Tim and Jill Woster (907) 488-5648. The next Catholic Engaged Encounter weekend retreat is scheduled for October 18-20, 2019.

Feast and Faith for Young Adults

Our first Feast and Faith of the autumn season will be on Tuesday, September 17th at 6:00 PM at Miguel’s Restaurant on Airport Way. This is a monthly gathering of young adult Catholics 18-35’ish coming together for a meal, fellowship, and discussion. This month we would like to invite recent high school graduates, University of Alaska students and newly married couples to join us for our gathering. Come out and meet other young adults and get connected with various activities happening throughout the summer, social and spiritual!
Thank you to the staff who assisted in the quinquennial report. The report was completed and submitted to the Nuncio’s Office in Washington, D.C. Bishop Zielinski is scheduled to make his ad limina visit in February 2020, where he will meet with the Pope and Vatican officials.

The following people contributed to the report:
- Mary Pat Bogert
- Susan Clifton
- Rev. Robert Fath
- Nancy Hanson
- Dorothy Hebard
- Rev. Mark Hoelskin
- Ann Nickerson
- Leigh Scarboro
- David Schienle
- Rev. Ross Tozzi


Sacramental Records, Official Catholic Directory, and Diocesan Directory information is due to the Archives by September 30. To track the status of records you can visit the archive website at: http://bit.ly/2LFfkmb.

Chancery Staff Changes

Barbara Theme Tolliver

After 30 years of working for the Diocese, Barbara has left her position. In the summer of 1989, Barbara arrived in Fairbanks, starting as Youth Minister for Sacred Heart Cathedral and Immaculate Conception Church. In 1993, she accepted a position as the Secretary to the Tribunal Office. She assisted in Safe Environment training in 2006 and in 2012 she became the Victim Assistance Coordinator.

Victim Assistance Coordinator and Safe Environment Coordinator

With the change in staff, Fred Villa has been assigned as the new Safe Environment Coordinator and Leigh Scarboro is the new Victim Assistance Coordinator.
Legion of Mary, Mary, Queen of Peace Auxiliary Rally

On August 11th, the Legion of Mary held its second annual auxiliary rally. Among those present was a delightful gentleman named Pietro, originally from the outskirts of Rome, Italy, who was visiting Fairbanks and living in Washington DC. He went home with the book *Inside the Legion of Mary*.

Devotion to Our Blessed Mother has not only been growing in the Fairbanks area. Fr. Tom Kuffel closed the hour with Benediction and Reposition of the Blessed Sacrament singing the Marian hymn, “Sing of Mary.” Afterward, all proceeded to Murphy Hall for light refreshments and conversation.

We are extending an invitation to anyone interested in the Lay Apostolate of the Legion of Mary to contact the parish office at Immaculate Conception Church in Fairbanks, AK, (907) 452-3533.

Rosary Congress, October 4-6

There will be 60 hours of perpetual adoration for conversion, vocations, reparation, and sanctification. The congress will be held at Immaculate Conception Church, Fairbanks. To sign up go to https://signup.com/go/vit OwMK.

The Rosary Congress of the USA is a nationwide effort to promote Eucharistic Adoration in our Diocese and also to promote the recitation of the Rosary.

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Job Openings

**Accounting Technician**

The Diocese of Fairbanks is seeking an Accounting Technician for 30 hours a week. This position will be responsible for supporting the Chief Financial Officer for the Diocese of Fairbanks by providing accounting support in multiple areas. Primary duties are Accounts Payable, including the receipt and accountability of all recurring and non-recurring invoices for the diocese, credit card invoices, and check runs. In addition, this position would be responsible for direct parish support. Applicant must be proficient in QuickBooks in order to facilitate the setup and running of each parish. This position is benefits eligible. The Accounts Payable position performs all duties and responsibilities in alignment with the mission, vision and values of the Catholic Diocese of Fairbanks. This position will remain open until filled. For more information, please contact humanresources@cbna.org.

**Director of Mission Outreach**

The Diocese of Fairbanks is seeking a Director of Mission Outreach. This position is responsible for the overall messaging, general development initiatives and stewardship efforts for the Diocese of Fairbanks. Manages and directs diocesan solicitation, development, and expression of gratitude to donors. Oversees the content and ensures that the message of the Bishop is consistent in all communications of the diocese to include social media, direct mailings and published content. The Director of Mission Outreach position performs all duties and responsibilities in alignment with the mission, vision, and values of the Catholic Diocese of Fairbanks. This position is full time and benefits eligible and will remain open until filled. For more information, please contact humanresources@cbna.org.
Gary Chapman from Portland, Oregon, has been collecting Hot Wheels™ for a long time. He decided to share his enjoyment of Hot Wheels with the children in the Y-K Region. Each month, Gary assembles a box of cars, trucks, airplanes, and new models, and sends them to the region to be enjoyed by the children. There are anywhere from 50 to 100 in each box.

The Hot Wheels™ have been given out for different occasions and most times it is a long process as the children try to decide which one they would like. One night at 10:00 PM, there was a knock on our door. A young boy was there because he did not get his Hot Wheel. After a lengthy process of selecting one, he left a very happy young man. Meeting him on the street about two weeks later he came over, dug his hand into his pocket and showed off the Hot Wheel. Gary’s donations have made many children happy and given many hours of play.
This past June, the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, (FOCUS), had the privilege to send a group to Fairbanks, Alaska on a FOCUS Mission trip. Our group included students from five universities. Three of them being a part of the 153 campuses that have a FOCUS team serving on its campus. We were also accompanied by Fr. Gonzalo, a priest from the Miles Christi order based in Argentina. We are very thankful for Bishop Chad Zielinski of the Diocese of Fairbanks for allowing us to be able to come and help out in the community.

While in Fairbanks, we served in a soup kitchen and met those who came for meals and other provisions. Some of us helped out the volunteers by serving and cooking the food, while others sat down and ate with those who came. In conversations, we opened up about our relationships with Christ and learned more about encountering Christ in others. Our group discussed how we are looking forward to bringing these experiences back to campus, by growing in our confidence to share our faith with anyone that we encounter.

The majority of the week, we volunteered with the vacation bible school (VBS) at St. Nicholas in North Pole. In the afternoon we did service projects at some of the churches in Fairbanks. The VBS was a spectacular experience for us. We met the kids and catechized them through fun stations including skits, activities, videos, and games. We were surprised countless times by the depth of their faith. On Wednesday the kids went to confession and prayed. That day stuck out the most. Seeing how many of the children eagerly wanted to go to confession was inspiring. You could tell many of them knew the importance behind the sacrament.

This trip was an amazing opportunity for our entire group. It was not only a time to serve but a time to grow in our faith as well with daily Mass and adoration.

We would like to thank everyone who helped to make this trip possible. We’d especially like to thank Fr. Tom Kuffel, of Immaculate Conception Church in Fairbanks, who played a big role in setting up our trip.

This trip changed many of our lives and you will be in our prayers!
Building Up the Church

by Patrick Tam
Director of Adult Faith Program, Y-K Region
Parish Facilitator of Sacred Heart Church, Emmonak, AK
Vacation Bible School

For Emmonak, this summer saw a widening of the circle of our Christian family. In mid-July, our parish hosted the Lutheran group from Shawnee, KS. The group has been coming up to Alaska, visiting several parishes in our Y-K Region, and hosting Vacation Bible School the last few years. A group of five women and one man arrived in Emmonak. They spent a week gathering children for several hours each day for activities.

The theme of the VBS was *God’s Promise on Life’s Wild Ride*, using the image of young rafters navigating the various currents—sometimes smooth, sometimes turbulent—of our daily lives.

Over five days, the VBS attracted as many as 60 kids, ranging in age from 4 to 14. A couple of older children also attended and became helpers to work with the younger kids. Activities included lively singing with motions, prayer, telling bible stories, games, snacks, and arts and crafts. Kids were divided into groups by age and rotated among four different stations.

The children responded enthusiastically to VBS. Some would even show up hours before the activities started. On the last day, games, prizes, snacks, and plenty of hugs and goodbyes ended VBS. Since this was our first time hosting VBS, the team did not know how many children to expect. Seeing the great response, the team is thinking of bringing a larger team next year if invited to return.

Parents thanked the team for their ministry. The VBS team, in turn, shared their faith with enthusiasm and love. After they left Emmonak, they even emailed us asking if they could do some fund-raising to help our parish with the cost of heating oil. It seems that our relationship with the VBS people will last beyond the summer.

Petoskey Group

In mid-August, we were visited by a group of volunteer workers made up of eight men from Petoskey, MI, and one volunteer from Frisco, TX. Like the VBS team, these men have worked in other parishes of the Y-K Region for the last few years. Their first visit to Emmonak was focused on replacing the sheet iron on our leaking church roof and installing some new windows in the parish residence. The group was made up of nine men, most of whom have a history in construction or contractor experience. The group was joined by Stephen Kelly, a young helper from St. Marys. The group of volunteers had been thinking about dividing into two groups. The Alakanuk parish residence needed leveling and the church needed siding to be installed. But Jack Schultheis, manager of Kwikpak Fisheries in...
Emmonak, generously offered room and board for the Petoskey group as well as transportation between Emmonak and Alakanuk. The group stayed together at Kwikpak with some of them commuting daily to Alakanuk to work.

The weather remained sunny and dry most of the time so the roofing work went smoothly. On one rainy day when roofing was not possible, some of the guys looked around for other tasks and decided to renovate the Sacred Heart statue with a new coat of paint. This project led to some unexpected results: the alcove in which the statue stood was rebuilt, Jesus’ heart was painted in vibrant colors for the first time, and our church bell was installed inside the church porch. People would walk or ride by the church, stopping to thank the workers. Some dropped off water or snacks like fish-strips and fry-bread. Everyone complimented the men on the quality of their work.

The Petoskey workers were also men of faith and prayer. They usually started the day with a brief scripture reading and prayer. More often, their faith was expressed with drills and hammers. At the end of the Sunday Communion Service, they were invited to come forward and receive a blessing by the people. Like the VBS team, the Petoskey workers shared their faith with us in a very tangible way. Their short visit reminded us of how connected we are as a Christian family.
Petoskey group replacing the roof of Sacred Heart Church in Emmonak, AK.

Petoskey group replacing windows at the parish residence in Emmonak, AK.
Theo-drama vs. Ego-Drama

Rev. Tom Kuffel
Pastor of Immaculate Conception Church, Fairbanks

“The ego-drama is nothing compared with the theo-drama. The fun begins when we let God write our stories.”

— Bp. Robert Barron

Theo-drama versus ego drama is driven by human pride versus divine humility. Jesus humbled Himself, even enduring abject humiliations, naked and exposed on the cross, to reveal his complete self-control over humiliations.

If we are to become humble as He was, with a child-like attitude, we cannot be afraid of humiliations: past, present, or future, but know that in our shame or disgrace Jesus comes to heal and restore.

Personal sin rooted in Original Sin convicts us. We are completely broken; and yet, in our brokenness, we harden our hearts. This is the ego-drama.

Yet, our brokenness is not to drive us to a hardness of heart, but to humble our hearts so that the healing grace of Christ Who humbled Himself to be like us, restores our divine dignity. This is the theo-drama.

God, as Father, does not come to humiliate us because we have sinned, but He comes to restore us by revealing that no matter what humiliation we may suffer or have suffered we will be restored if we allow Him to penetrate the hardness of heart.

Our human mindset tells us to hide and bury our faults. Jesus comes telling us to expose and bare our sins. This is not for humiliation but to learn humility.

In exposing our very nakedness and shame of sin, we allow our Father through the Son to heal us.

This is the tension of the human condition. We, by nature, hide our sins; but by divine grace, we, by our trust in God, expose our sins so He can heal us.

When we expose our human weakness, we imitate Christ Who humbled Himself. This is a great mystery and the mystery is summed up by St. Paul who says: “Being found in human form, he humbled himself becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. So God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Phil 2:8)
Bishop Michael Barber from Oakland, California came to present to the clergy and the laity the newest letter of Pope Francis to priests. Many of Pope Francis’ comments on the priesthood have been critical, calling priests to be better shepherds, as does St. Peter tell us (1 Pet 5:1):

I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

Being a shepherd as Bishop Barber pointed out, we are to understand our own personal sufferings, the sufferings of our parishioners, and the sufferings within the Church. We have to acknowledge the suffering and how it personally affects us. But, we cannot dwell on our sufferings or the sufferings of others. We must move from suffering — desolation as St. Ignatius calls it — to consolation.

Consolations are those areas of our life in which we are grateful. What are you grateful for? To whom are you grateful and what blessings have you experienced in your life?

This is part of the daily examen prayer that not only priests but every Christian should do.

Examine your sufferings daily and petition God for healing, and also call to mind those blessings which God has given.

Finally, we discussed encouragement. Bitterness and angry attacks destroy a person. Instead of attacking and criticizing, priests especially but all persons need encouragement. Encouragement comes not only through others, but especially through prayer and specifically prayer to the Holy Spirit.
Interment of Fr. John Martinek

by David Schienle

On August 20th, clergy and parishioners joined Bishop Chad Zielinski at Birch Hill Cemetery in Fairbanks for the service of committal of Fr. John Martinek. Fr. Martinek passed away in July 2018. He retired in 2014 and was traveling the United States and Mexico by motor home. Before retiring he had served the Diocese for over 23 years, in Delta Junction, Tok, Galena, and Kotzebue.
MISSIONARY SPOTLIGHT

30 Years Among the Yup’ik People of Northern Alaska

Patrick Tam

Pat Tam came to the village of Emmonak in 1981, expecting to spend a year among the Yup’ik Eskimo people as a lay missionary. Then he heard God’s call to serve permanently. He has spent the past 30 years living among the Yup’ik, and now heads the diocese’s Adult Faith Formation program for 24 parishes in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region.

What most strongly influenced your faith growing up?
My mother’s faith was very important to my own spiritual journey. She’d grown up in China, and had witnessed the Communists oppress and even murder Christian missionaries, which impacted her deeply. Once she emigrated to Hong Kong as a young woman, she converted to Catholicism and has remained a strong Catholic her whole life. I have memories of her getting up early and kneeling before a small statue of Mary to pray her daily rosary. Later on, once we moved to the United States, she took on extra work doing alterations to pay for me and my siblings to attend Catholic schools. Her faith wasn’t showy, but was more of a quiet witness to those around her. It even led to my father’s conversion just a few years ago, in his 70s. We’re all Catholic because of her.

How did you discern your missionary call and how did that lead you to Alaska?
My last year of college, I sort of realized I had been living for myself and not for others. I decided to spend a year with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, which sent me to Alaska, to the small Yup’ik Eskimo village of Emmonak. I was struck by a question villagers would ask me over and over: “When are you leaving?” It pricked my conscience, and made me think that God might be calling me to stay among the Yup’ik people and serve them with my whole heart instead of treating them like a “missionary experience” and then moving on. This didn’t sit well with my Chinese mother, of course, who struggled with the fact that she’d sacrificed to send me to a Catholic high school and a Catholic college, only to have me choose a simple village life in remote Alaska! After three decades, my family has pretty much accepted my calling, but I still think my mother holds out hope I’ll eventually “come to my senses” and move into a more traditional career. I don’t know what the future holds—my parents are older now and I may need to leave Emmonak and take care of them some day. For now, the Yup’ik people are the family God has called me to live among and serve.

What advice do you have for someone who thinks she or he may be called to missionary work?
Id say to stop thinking about it and just go experience it. One thing I’ve learned from the Yup’ik is that you learn best by doing it yourself, even if that means making mistakes along the way. God’s call can be heard in prayer, yes, but it can also be heard simply through the real-life experience of loving people. If you think you’re called to serve, go serve. He will tell your heart if that’s where you’re meant to be.

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