



The Alaskan Shepherd



Volume 41 Number 7

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Some give by going to the Missions

Some go by giving to the Missions

Without both there are no Missions

NULATO

Editor's Note: In the summer of the year 2002, Gloria Slagle--Director of Religious Education and Youth Ministry at St. Raphael parish in Fairbanks--traveled with six teenagers and St. Raphael's pastor, Father Patrick Bergquist, to Nulato, Alaska, to bring to that all-Catholic community Vacation Bible School. Their visit marked the first time in 20 years that Catholic teachers, other than local villagers, taught in Nulato. Since 1998, priests stationed in Galena have been visiting Nulato to bring that community the Mass and Sacraments. Currently, Brother Robert Ruzicka, a Franciscan Friar, serves as Nulato's Pastoral Administrator. Since her first experience in Nulato was so enjoyable and successful, Gloria plans to bring the Vacation Bible School there again this year, 2003--and for as many more years as funding allows.

--Patty Walter

Last summer a dream—my dream— came true. In the summer of 2000, Bishop Michael J. Kaniecki, S.J., enabled me to visit several bush parishes in northern Alaska. The first was Unalakleet. After that, I journeyed to St. Michael and Stebbins. The purpose was to visit with families and share ideas on teaching young people the gospel and the Catholic faith. During these visits, I learned that the people of the villages had enjoyed visits from Catholic Sisters who, during the summer, came to teach vacation bible school. As early as 1891, the Jesuits ran a “contract school” at Nulato. In 1899, three Sisters of St. Ann arrived there to open a day school. With some slight breaks, the Sisters of St. Ann served at Nulato in various capacities, though mainly as schoolteachers, until 1983. I wondered if Nulato people would feel the same, if a group from a parish in Fairbanks made a commitment to come every summer to teach Vacation Bible School.

I shared this idea with my St. Raphael parish youth group and found them eager and interested. Our parish council tithes a portion of our annual income for outreach programs. The council voted to fund a Vacation Bible School outreach to the village of Nulato. We were able to supplement this contribution with some grant money from a parish



(All Photos courtesy of Gloria Slagle)

in Maryland. Father Pat Bergquist contacted Brother Bob Ruzicka, O.F.M., the Pastoral Administrator of Our Lady of the Snows parish. Brother Bob was pleased to have us visit and teach in his village parish. By June, we had all the money we needed to take six teens and three adults to Nulato and back. We purchased food for the nine

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1312 PEGER ROAD FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709
Phone: 907-474-0753 <http://www.cbna.info>

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.

of us, snacks for the children, and craft supplies to last the five days of the program.

With provisions and tickets in hand—Father Pat, myself, Linda Winkler, and six teenage girls, traveled to Nulato on July 13, to spend a week teaching Bible school and making ourselves available to help Brother Bob with some of the cleaning and the organizing of the mission.

We arrived in Nulato on a Saturday afternoon and spent the first afternoon and evening unpacking and getting settled. That evening, two of the villagers, a teenage girl and her dad, offered to take us on a tour of historic Nulato and the surrounding area. We walked up to Cemetery Hill and scanned the town and river below it. We looked at the unusual gravesites, which were very neatly and attractively decorated.

Nulato was the trading site between Koyukon Athabaskans and Inupiat Eskimos from the Kobuk and Unalakleet areas. Nulato has every right to claim the primacy among Catholic missions in Alaska. Nulato first saw Catholic missionaries in June, 1873, when Oblate Bishop Isidore Clut and Father Auguste Lecorre passed by there on their way downriver to St. Michael. In 1877, on July 31, Archbishop Charles J. Seghers and Father Joseph Mandart arrived at Nulato to spend the year working there and out of there. The Archbishop dedicated the mission under the title of *Sancta Maria Ad Nives* ("St. Mary of the Snows") in 1877. In 1950, the mission's name was slightly modified to "Our Lady of the Snows." The parish is located in Old Town and faces the Yukon River.



Charles, Wesley, and Justin--Nulato youth, gather around Gloria Slagle to learn a song. Music comprised much of the Vacation Bible School program.

Brother Bob is the Pastoral Administrator for the parish of over 100 families.

On Sunday, we attended Mass and invited the children to come to Vacation Bible School, featuring our core program, based on the cartoon Veggie Tales™.

We spent the afternoon setting up our learning area, cleaning, and organizing the convent where the girls and I stayed. Later, we walked the gravel road between Old Town and New Town and visited a parishioner and his daughter who helped us during our stay.

Old Town has no plumbing. We hauled water and used the outhouse. There is a Laundromat near the church, which had showers

and restrooms and allowed us to take a nice hot shower every day. At the church, we had to heat water to wash dishes. The girls were cheerful and uncomplaining about the primitive facilities.

Many children arrived the first day—curious about the strangers who came to town. The teens played with the children until it was time for the program to begin. We noticed that this was just as vital to the children as school—they craved the genuine attention and the one-on-one time with the teens. Besides playing and teaching, we were also able to go for walks where we enjoyed picking flowers and blueberries.

Each day we met for Morning Prayer, which was centered on the theme of the Bible lesson for that day. We spent time in reflection, discussion, and prayer. We also reviewed our lesson plan for the day. After this, we served lunch and set up the afternoon activities.

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. For more information, please contact Tom Buzek, Facilitator of Business Activities: 907-474-0753.

CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA

1312 PEGER ROAD
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709-5199

September 15, 2003

Dear Friends of the Missions of Northern Alaska,

Over the years many of you have written to us who serve the Lord and His people here in the Far North to express to us your admiration for what we do in this missionary diocese to make known the "Good News," to bring the Mass and the sacraments to the Lord's widely scattered flocks entrusted to our care. You have graciously thanked us for ministering to the people of northern Alaska in spite of difficulties of all kinds. We are touched by such expressions of sincere admiration and gratitude. They hearten us, and are very much appreciated.

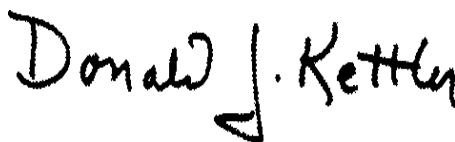
Remember: what we do, you do; where we go, you go. In a very real sense you are our co-workers, our co-ministers. With your prayers for us and our works, and with your generous financial aid, you help us carry out our basic ministries, and you share in them--and you will share in the rewards. As you are making possible our ministries, you are, at the same time, "laying up treasure for yourselves in heaven."

A few years ago, with a small donation, a kind benefactor of the Catholic Missions of Northern Alaska established the Alaskan Shepherd Endowment Fund. The principal of this fund cannot be touched; only the interest earned by it can be used for current needs. This fund is our one best hope for a sound, long-range fiscal future. We feel the time to build it up to where its earnings will finally get this needy 409,849 square-mile missionary diocese on a more or less stable financial foundation is now. Accordingly, I now invite you, ask each one of you to help us get that Alaskan Shepherd Endowment Fund into high gear by giving it a significant boost--to the extent that your means allow, of course. Know that in the fund your gift will keep on giving into the far-distant future, making you a permanent part of what we are and do for the Lord and His people here in northern Alaska.

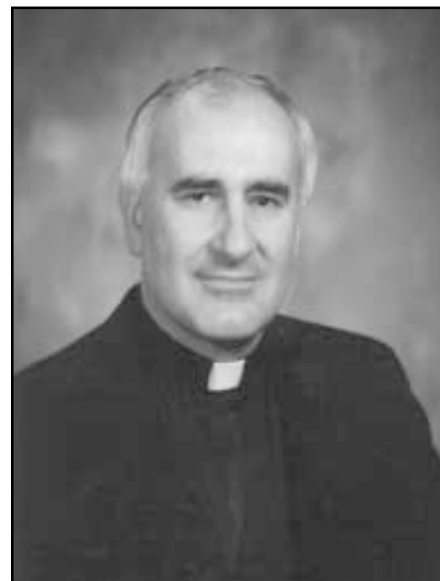
On this occasion I want to thank personally each and every one of you who has ever contributed, no matter in how small a way, to our ever so vital Endowment Fund. And I want to thank you in advance for your response to this, my urgent appeal to help us build up that fund.

And, finally, I 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. God bless us everyone!

Very gratefully yours in Our Lord,



Donald J. Kettler
Bishop of Fairbanks



TO: CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA

1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709 DATE _____ #S 2003 07--82

Dear Bishop Kettler:

Enclosed is my special donation of \$_____ to your all important Alaskan Shepherd Endowment Fund. I am happy and grateful to be able to be a part of your missionary diocese and its ministries.

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Please make checks payable to: CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA

Please send me _____ copy(ies) of

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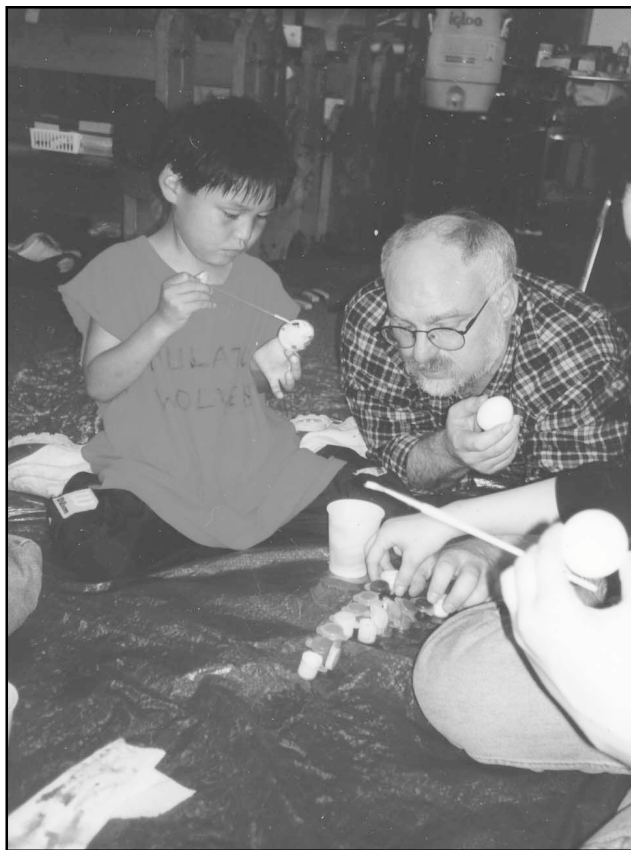
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Memoirs of a Yukon Priest



Memoirs of a Yukon Priest, by Father Segundo Llorente, S.J., described as “*an engagingly personal account of his 40 years in Alaska, written in an oral style...an outpour, a torrent of words rich in concrete, vivid detail, saturated with personal opinions, reflections, observations*” -- can be ordered from The Alaskan Shepherd, 1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, AK. 99709, for \$25.00 which includes shipping and handling.



Father Pat Bergquist and Marvin Cimeon spend their time painting during daily craft time.

Afternoon activities commenced at 1:00 with about 25 children singing! The songs were upbeat and gospel-centered. Subsequently, we taught an object lesson that featured the lesson of the day. A puppet show followed and then a gospel story or reading by Father Pat. We discussed the lesson, after which, Brother Bob led us in quiet meditation. Around this time, we broke for a snack and recess. When the children returned, we assembled crafts, cleaned up, and ended the day with prayer.

In the evenings, we had a nice meal together and participated in community activities. One evening we went fishing. Some evenings we watched movies about faith, including movies about Marian apparitions—which always led to fine discussions. A couple of evenings found us learning Native beadwork. Yet another evening we attended a potlatch held in honor of the elders. We ate customary foods and danced to Athabaskan Indian songs—led by the elders and accompanied by traditional drumming. That same evening the girls were invited to go tubing on the Yukon River and had a wonderful time. Afterwards, they

invited the Native girls to come and have a sleepover at the old convent.

That next day was Saturday and “Baseball Weekend” in Nulato. Teams came from many villages up and down the Yukon River. We watched “our kids” play their games—and win! Besides the modern pastime of baseball—Nulato holds the distinction of being one of only two “stickdance” villages. The Heeyo or Stickdance Ceremony is the most honorable and remarkable tradition in the Athabaskan culture and brings visitors from all over the region and state. The event rotates between Nulato and Kaltag. It is a ceremony, celebrated in March, that helps families deal with the grief and loss of loved ones. A pole—decorated spruce stick—is used during a potlatch celebration and dance. The stick symbolizes the souls of those deceased members of the community. The “Stickdance” plays a major role in Athabaskan culture—providing families with a final grand farewell to their loved ones.

During our stay in the one-time convent, the girls cleaned and straightened things up. It was bursting with old tools, religious items, and clothing. We added new rugs to the rooms and



Stefani Schruf, Julie & Jamie Thierman, Adrienna Holden, Katelin Delaney, Linda Winkler, and Amanda Nance complete the team of dedicated teens and parishioners who traveled to Nulato to bring Vacation Bible School to parishioners of Our Lady of the Snows church.



Brother Bob shows Marvin Cosmos a box marked "Fragile, handle with care." The lid is lifted to reveal a mirror with God's most precious gift.

set up the place to look like a holy area. It resembled a modest museum. Several elders, who had not seen the convent for years, were happy to see it looking so first-rate. They had memories of attending Mass there when they were children.

On our final Sunday, we had a wonderful Mass and the children sang songs they had learned during the week. They used hand signs because one of the Nulato teens is deaf and taught us all how to sign the song.

Prior to leaving, a woman from the Nulato City Council came by and gave each of us a book from the Centennial Celebration of the parish as well as a cloisonné pin of the church and convent.

We enjoyed beautiful weather throughout our stay. We took many walks. The days were so hot there that the mosquitoes, thank goodness, were few. The blueberries were luscious. Pink fireweed blanketed the hills. The pace was slow and unhurried. We spent a portion of our days sitting and pondering on the bank of the Yukon River—agreeing unanimously that life in Nulato is peaceful and serene.

Yet, as in most places, there is strife in some Nulato families or problems with alcohol and

drugs. Our message and the attention we lavished on the children was especially well received.

We have kept in contact with Brother Bob and the with the children by writing letters and sending gifts. One young man, who grew up in Nulato, now resides in Anchorage. After hearing of our visit, he began writing to me. He was touched that someone had reached out to his village—we continue to correspond.

Nulato residents are predominately Koyukon Athabaskans, with a trapping and subsistence lifestyle. Virtually all of the residents are Catholic. There is much good fruit coming from this outreach and we are eager to return. We have applied for grants to help us to return to Nulato each summer.

--Gloria Slagle



Father Pat Bergquist and Gloria Slagle about to be airborne.

Special thanks to those of you who have sent stamps! These 37¢ first class gifts are of great use to the Alaskan Shepherd.

Again we assure you that we never, under any circumstances, sell, exchange, or give out the names of our benefactors. This has been and continues to be our sacred pledge.