



# The Alaskan Shepherd



Volume 47 Number 1

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*Some give by going to the Missions*

*Some go by giving to the Missions*

*Without both there are no Missions*

## **BROTHER JUSTIN HUBER: FRANCISCAN MISSIONARY IN ALASKA**

*“You have to constantly learn new things, to challenge yourself.”*

That is what Brother R. Justin Huber told a reporter in June of 1980 in Oak Brook, Illinois, where he performed General Maintenance, and where he served as a Carpenter, Auto Mechanic and Electrician, at St. Paschal’s Friary. During that time, he also served as a volunteer for the Oak Brook Fire Department. Nearly 30 years later, Brother Justin still lives by that sagacious self-given advice. Rather a “jack of all trades,” he is also a master of many skills and truly indispensable in his current ministry in bush Alaska.

Robert Justin Huber was born to Robert J. Huber and Sallie J. Neill in Lakewood, Ohio, on June 23, 1944. He lived in Ohio until 1963 when he answered the call to become a Franciscan Brother in Westmont, Illinois. In 1970, he took his Solemn Profession on June 27, in Oak Brook, Illinois.

The page 2 headline in the Oak Brook newspaper on June 22, 1980, read, “*Brother Justin volunteers again.*” In addition to his duties at the St. Paschal Friary, Brother Justin manned the firehouse when the department got a call. He worked on valves and air brakes on the department’s truck from time to time. He occasionally operated the pumps on the fire engines during fires; he plowed local streets when the Public Works Department could not handle the load. He trained new department personnel and in fact, he helped train the 1980 fire Chief



*Brother Justin Huber, O.F.M., poses for a picture in front of Mt. McKinley (Denali) wearing his trademark fishing cap. Brother Justin is now in his 45th year as a Franciscan and in his eighth year of service in Alaska.*

*All photos courtesy of Brother Justin*

James Clark. Before the fire department became a village function it operated entirely with volunteers. Clark remembers, “*He was instrumental in guiding us at first. He also helped the department of only three to keep their sanity on the long, lonely shifts. It was rewarding to have someone to talk to then.*” In 1980, Brother Justin wanting to work in a missionary capacity wrote to his superior Father Dismas:

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1312 PEGER ROAD FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709  
Phone: 907-374-9532    <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.*



*Brother Justin's little one-room 20' x 22' cabin in Galena, Alaska, stands next to St. John Berchmans' Church. Brother Justin operates a ham radio station out of his residence. The residence was previously a garage.*

*Thank you for your letter of March 20 in regard to my possible participation in the mission of Zaire. I talked with Father Jim Hoffman...he says that I could pick up the common form of Swahili from the people rather readily. With that assurance, I do not hesitate to take on the learning of those languages (Swahili and French.) Enclosed is a brief letter from Fr. Jim about the learning possibilities of those languages.*

*In view of what I have been told by Father Jim and in keeping with my abiding interest in the mission of Zaire I want it known that I am anxious to go at the earliest possible date. My first letter in this regard was two years ago. I find no reason for a delay in my petition. If I may quote a famous personage from the Old Testament, "Here I am Lord. Send me."*

*Please give me a definite answer about when I can go to the Zaire mission.*

Brother Justin was granted that permission in 1980 and after spending some time in France learning the official language of Zaire, he was sent to Kasaji, (Shaba Province) a village of 1000, which sits on the 10<sup>th</sup> parallel south of the equator, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Africa.

From 1980 to 1989, Brother Justin served officially as the Procurator and Treasurer for the Vice Province of St. Benedict the African parish. An article in

the Franciscan Journal, Sept-Oct, 1986, Volume 29 No. 5, reports:

*Being the Procurator and Treasurer for the Vice Province of St. Benedict the African is no easy chore. Brother Justin serves well in this capacity. When in need of money or supplies, the friars know whom to see. Brother Justin of course, has to take HIS needs elsewhere—some even to the Franciscan Missionary Union.*

*The extra talents of Brother Justin lie in his mechanical gifts: electronics, plumbing and general mechanics. He does not have a dull moment. He spends lots of time training Native Zairians in the tricks of the trade...all part of a fully developing people.*

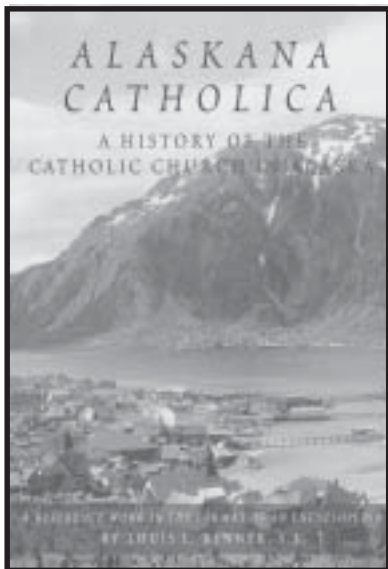
Of his mission work in Zaire, Brother Justin comments in an interview with David Schienle, "Being in Africa was good preparation for work in the Alaska missions. We had one priest to 25 parishes and Africa was much poorer than here. I primarily worked between missions teaching people how to grow and cultivate—doing things their way—but striving for an easier way.

In 1989, Brother Justin returned to Ohio and to St. Anthony of Padua High School where he served as a Technical Consultant. He worked in the school until 1992 when he was asked to relocate to Crowley, Texas to serve at St. Francis Village, a non-profit retirement community, as Assistant Administrator and Director of Maintenance.



*Brother Justin shares a cup of coffee and a story with Brother Bob Ruzicka, O.F.M., and village Elders.*

# INSPIRATIONAL AND HISTORICAL



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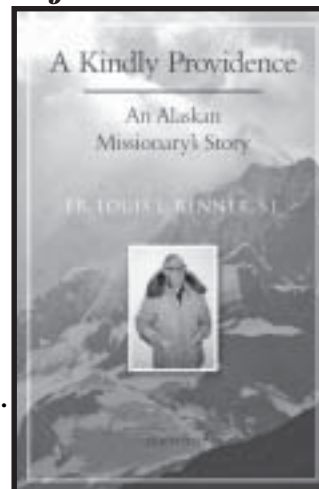
## **A KINDLY PROVIDENCE:**

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*By Fr. Louis L. Renner, S.J.*

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In *Alaskana Catholica*, Fr. Renner offers a thorough picture of the Catholic Church's ministerial activity in Alaska from its beginning in the nineteenth century to the present. In his autobiography, *A Kindly Providence*, he tells the story of a dedicated missionary priest. A scholar, a teacher, and always a Jesuit priest, he taught German and Latin at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, edited the Catholic newsletter *The Alaskan Shepherd*, and served as pastor of two different Indian villages on the Yukon River during his 40 years in Alaska. He was a recipient of the "Governor's Award for Friend of the Humanities," in 2002. The two books, both richly illustrated, are now available from the *Alaskan Shepherd*. The books are perfect gifts, whether to give or to receive! *Proceeds benefit the Catholic Missions of Northern Alaska.* [www.cbna.info](http://www.cbna.info)

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TO: CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA  
1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-5199

*Please remember the following petitions during the Novena of Grace:*

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## ***NOVENA OF GRACE***

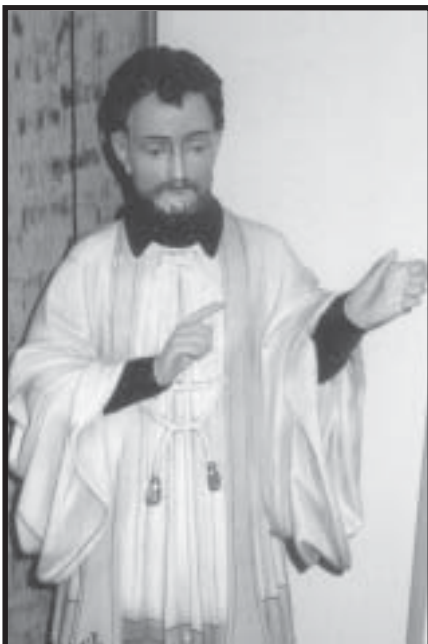
Each year during the month of March, a Novena is offered for you, our benefactors, and for your petitions.

The Novena of Grace is so called because countless people have had their prayers answered by God through the intercession of St. Francis Xavier, the Jesuit Apostle to the Orient in the sixteenth century and the patron saint of worldwide missions.

We invite you to send us your petitions. Both you and your needs will be remembered on each of the nine days. The Fathers on the missions also will remember you and your intentions in their Masses and prayers during the Novena.

We invite all of you to join us in this Novena of Grace by reciting--from the 4th of March to the 12th inclusive--the following prayers.

*O most amiable and loving St. Francis Xavier, in union with you I adore the Divine Majesty. While joyfully giving thanks to God for the great graces which He conferred upon you in life and for the great glory with which He has gifted you in heaven, I come to you with heartfelt love, begging you to secure for me, by your powerful intercession, the inestimable blessings of living and dying in the state of grace. I also beseech you to obtain for me the favors I ask in this Novena\_\_\_\_\_.*



*But if what I ask is not for the Glory of God, or for the good of my soul, do you obtain for me what is most conducive to both. Amen.*

**Our Father; Hail Mary; Glory be to the Father.**

**V. Pray for us, St. Francis Xavier,**

**R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.**

*Let us pray: O God, you chose to bring into your Church peoples of the Orient through the preaching and miracles of St. Francis Xavier, mercifully grant us that we may imitate his virtues, whose glorious merits we hold in veneration.*

**We ask this through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.**

In 1995, he moved to Alverna Friary in Mountain City, TN, in the Appalachian Mountains to serve in the Franciscan Mountain Ministries. In this ministry, he also worked with people to try to show them how to grow and cultivate crops.

Brother Bob recalls this story about Brother Justin's decision to serve in Alaska: *I have known Justin for 40 years. The first thing I know about him is that he is so talented. He becomes an ace in everything he does, from being a locksmith, to watch making, to plumbing, to electrical work, to mechanical work to carpentry—it seems that there is nothing that he is not well versed in doing. We have always been close friends. I remember about 10 years ago. I asked him if he ever thought of coming to Alaska. Justin replied that it was like going from the frying pan into the freezer. The next thing I knew he came that February to “check it out.” Fr. Joe Hemmer, O.S.F., took him to Ruby for a “trial.” When he returned to Galena, he said to me, “Well, if I can survive an outhouse at -30, then I can survive Alaska.” At the time, I smiled. Later, when talking with Fr. Joe I said, “I thought you had a honey bucket in Ruby for the winter. (A honey bucket would make a trip to the outhouse unnecessary in the wintertime.) Fr. Joe just smiled and said, “I guess I forgot.” Justin came that summer to stay.*

Brother Justin enjoys his ministry in Galena. The village is about half Athabaskan Indian. He says he adapted quickly to the climate, learning to dress correctly in layers for the winter. He has found that because of the nature of Missionary work and the transferring in and out of priests, sisters, and brothers that the trust between ministers and the Native people has to be earned over a period of sometimes years. Brother Justin currently serves as Director of Maintenance and Pastoral Minister in Galena. When asked what the greatest reward of his ministry is he replied, *“I work directly with the people. I touch people by assisting them in their day-to-day living. I am asked a lot ‘Brother can you come over and show me how to do this?’ That is my reward that I can assist them so readily. A smile here and laughter there—those are my greatest rewards.”*

Brother Bob insists that Justin does not credit himself enough for his many gifts. *“He is an expert in so many fields. He shares his gifts with everyone. His talents are not reserved for himself or for only those who ask. As a jack-of-all-trades, he is essential to the*



**Brother Justin volunteers 60 feet above Galena soil working to place a transmitter cable for station KIYU, a listener supported public radio station operating on 910 AM.**

*mission villages. The little things he mentions doing are done often and tirelessly. Part of being a Franciscan is a commitment to live a life as the person you are, as a Brother celebrating Christ and to take Christ everywhere you go. One of the brothers walking with St. Francis through a town asked in exasperation when they would begin preaching to the people. Francis' famous answer was ‘preach at all times and if necessary use words.’”* Brother Bob contends that this is precisely what Justin exhibits daily. He lives with the people, he gets his hands dirty, and he goes beyond fixing their problems, he offers solutions, training, and friendship along the way.”

In addition to his many mechanical skills, Brother Justin is a Ham Radio Operator and operates a small 5-milowatt station, which residents can “pick up” within a one-mile radius. He volunteers at the local radio station KIYU, a 12.5-kilowatt listener-supported public radio station, broadcasting on 910 AM to the Middle Yukon and Lower Koyukuk region of the Interior of Alaska. Villages served by KIYU include Ruby, Galena, Koyukuk, Nulato, Huslia, Kaltag, and Hughes. Other villages that hear KIYU programming through their local stations include Holy Cross, Anvik, Grayling, Shageluk, McGrath, and Fort Yukon. Brother Justin does most of the station's antennae and tower work.

At St. John Berchmans church, Brother Justin operates in many capacities. The parish is currently without a priest and relies on liturgical support from

Brother Justin, who resides in a cabin next to the church, and on Sister Marilyn Marx, S.N.J.M., the Director of the Kateri Tekakwitha Center located in Galena.

Brother Justin does whatever is necessary for the operation of St. John Berchmans' Church. He has cleaned toilets, repaired vehicles, maintained the Tekakwitha Center as well as the church and his own residence, provided electrical assistance and he has even washed and prepared bodies for burial.

After spending eight years in the villages, he feels accepted, trusted, and quite comfortable with Native customs and lifestyles. He says one of the customs that he really appreciates but had a difficult time adapting to at first is the Native custom of entering a house without knocking. Brother Justin says "dropping in" on one another is one of the most culturally acceptable things to do in an Athabaskan home. He finds that when calling on parishioners it is almost rude not to enter, seat yourself, and partake of whatever food or drink is available. Everyone is treated like family.

During an interview with David Schienle, Brother Justin jokingly recalled a moment on the Yukon River with Brother Bob. "One time I was on the river coming back from Kaltag with Brother Bob in a fishing boat. Brother Bob says 'follow that Native person he knows this river like the back of his hand.' We both ended up stuck on a gravelbar. That was the last time I listened to Brother Bob. (Laughs) It took ½ hour to get both boats back into the water."

Father Richard Case, S.J., previous pastor of St. John Berchmans, greatly appreciated Brother Justin during his time in Galena. "Last year when Brother Justin was on vacation for a month, I jokingly said to Russ Sweetsir that he might not return. Russ asked if his tools were still here. I replied that they were still in the garage. He confidently replied that Brother Justin would return. Russ knew he would never leave without his tools! I greatly admire Brother Justin's approach to completing projects. He plans very carefully and works until the last detail is finished. He is a good Franciscan and a good friend."

Deacon Bob Mantei, Chancery Director of Maintenance has need of Brother Justin's talents often in regards to security and re-keying buildings and offices. Brother Justin graciously performs these services for the chancery when he passes through Fairbanks, to attend a meeting, or to pick up supplies or parts. When Deacon Bob was asked what Brother Justin's greatest gift was he replied simply, "the guy saves us money!"

It is hard to imagine the real cost that would be involved in hiring or contracting the different professionals we would need to complete the projects that Brother Justin achieves daily. Beyond the savings to our budget, we are blessed with a missionary that

brings the gifts of St. Francis to the many people he serves in a very visible way. Words are seldom necessary when Brother Justin Huber preaches. — P a t t y Walter



*Alaskan Friars pose for a photo in Kaltag, Alaska. Left to Right: Brother Robert Ruzicka, O.F.M., Father Joseph Hemmer, O.F.M., and Brother Justin Huber, O.F.M.*

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are greatly appreciated.***