



The Alaskan Shepherd



Volume 47 Number 7

September 2009

Some give by going to the Missions

Some go by giving to the Missions

Without both there are no Missions

SISTER MARIAN LEAF, O.S.F., MISSIONARY IN ANIAK, ALASKA

Editor's Note: Sister Marian Leaf, O.S.F., joined the Alaskan Franciscan Sisters in 2006, as Parish Facilitator in the Y-K Region. She works with the villages of Aniak—where she resides—Holy Cross, Kalskag, Pilot Station, and Mountain Village.

Marian Leaf graduated from high school in 1973 and received a BA in sociology from Neumann College in Aston, PA. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia on January 15, 1978. She took her First Vows in August 1980 and professed her Perpetual Vows in August 1986. In 1988, she received a Masters in Social Work from Marywood College in Scranton, PA. Of her brief time in Alaska, Sr. Marian says, *I landed on this stretch of earth back in August 2006, after 12 years in Zambia, Africa, and a year of Sabbatical. It was during my transition time back here in the U.S. that I realized I still had a yearning for "a missionary life and work," and felt convinced that God had "something else up his divine sleeve," when my work in Zambia ended. My deepest hope and prayer was that God would reveal an opportunity here in the States to which I could happily respond. However, despite trying to envision my life back in the States, Alaska was never on my mind's radar, until it unexpectedly popped up on the horizon with one little e-mail. I became interested in Alaska, when one of our Sisters already serving here, Sr. Rose Monica, who herself had spent a number of years in Africa, contacted me and invited me to "have a think" about Alaska. Still in the midst of my Sabbatical, the idea*



Sister Marian poses under a rack of drying salmon, in Aniak, Alaska. Subsistence foods contribute largely to villagers' diets. Many families travel to fish camps each summer.

All photos provided courtesy of Sister Marian Leaf, O.S.F.

percolated and with a growing suspicion that God was indeed in the invitation, I accepted the challenge as yet another blessed adventure that God deems fit to dish out to me periodically.

We are greatly indebted to Sister Marian for her service and dedication to the people of Northern Alaska.

In this issue Sister Marian reflects on her ministry and on life in Aniak from January 2009 through May 2009.
—Patty Walter

CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA
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.



Aniak is a Central Yup'ik Eskimo village on the south bank of the Kuskokwim River in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Some Roman Catholic parishioners of Aniak have their roots in the Holy Cross and Paimiut Missions. Baptisms were administered at Aniak long before a permanent mission was established. The year 1939 marks the beginning of an official Catholic presence at Aniak, when Fr. Francis Menager, S.J., established a church in the village. St. Theresa Church, shown above, was dedicated in 1986.

As I write this, on January 1, 2009, it is -35 outside. A five-minute ride on the back of a 4-wheeler, results in a bit of frostbite on the face. Taking out the trash requires several layers of clothing. Darkness wins out for 18 hours a day, but eventually the summer sun takes revenge and barely sets at all. The landscape on this stretch of earth is contradictory: beautiful yet dangerous, stark yet bountiful, harsh yet captivating, huge yet insular, and isolating. Aniak, Alaska, is a small dot on the map: the home of St. Theresa Catholic Parish. The second floor of St. Theresa's serves as my home base. "How happy are they that dwell in the house of the Lord!"

St. Theresa Catholic Church exists in a small multi-cultural, multi-racial community; an unusual situation compared to other small, rural villages, which speckle the Kuskokwim and Yukon Rivers. It is one of 24 parishes spread out over hundreds of miles and, together, they make up the Yukon-Kuskokwim Region of the Fairbanks Diocese.

Unlike other native, rural villages, Aniak was founded around 1910 because of the surrounding mining camps and the need for a trading post and a transportation center. Thus, from its very beginning, Aniak has enjoyed a cultural diversity that is unique for such a small village.

Aniak is diverse in religious faiths as well. St. Theresa, established in 1939 by the Jesuits, is only one of several churches, which currently exist in Aniak. As a

result, our Catholic parish has been, and remains, a small community of about 25 families. Adding to this complexity is that many Aniak families straddle various religions, and children can often find themselves between two churches, mainly the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Church.

Sadly, due to the current lack of priests in our diocese, our parish here shares one priest with four other parishes, thus is one of five visited by Fr. Stan Jaszek. Without a resident priest, serving the sacramental life of our parish is certainly a challenge, and, in fact, St. Theresa struggles to keep its faith community strong and growing. But, Aniak is a sign of God's goodness. This can be found in the parish team of Eucharistic Ministers and Acting Parish Administrator, which are the glue of the parish!

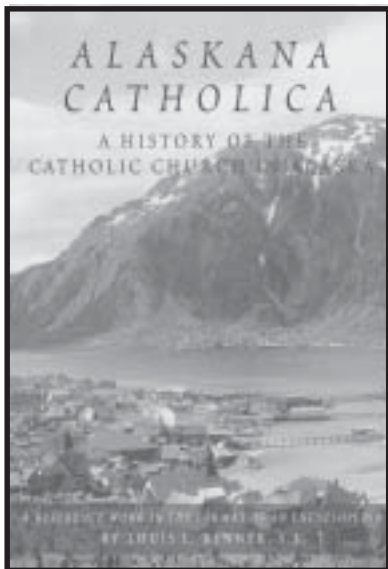
Liz Murphy is our acting parish administrator who spends her time keeping the mail sorted, bills paid and filed, shelves stocked with necessities, making sure the heating oil is adequate, and the church building in good shape. Liz is also one of the Eucharist Ministers and is in charge of selling Religious Goods and items. Locally, Liz is known for the goodies she bakes for the social gatherings that happen periodically after Sunday Service and/or Sunday Liturgy with the priest.

Aniak is also fortunate to have a dedicated married couple for our other Eucharist Ministers. Angie and Carl Morgan are central to our parish life and help to hold down the fort by leading the Sunday Service: The Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion during the weeks in which Aniak has no priest. They visit the sick and shut-



An Easter altar in St. Theresa Catholic Church in Aniak, Alaska.

INSPIRATIONAL AND HISTORICAL



ALASKANA CATHOLICA:

A History of the Catholic Church in Alaska

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

(Hardcover 702 pages) \$85.00 includes shipping.

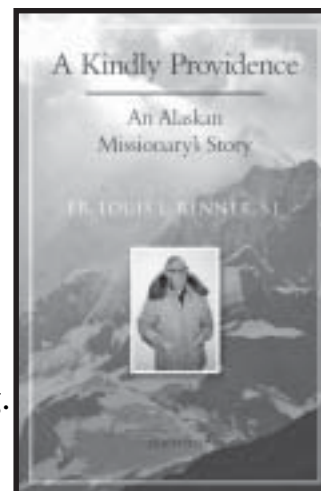
A KINDLY PROVIDENCE:

An Alaskan Missionary's Story

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

(Paperback 507 pages) \$35.00, includes shipping.

Newly Published:



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

**Yes, please send _____ copy(ies) of *Alaskana Catholica*,
written by *Father Louis L. Renner, S.J.***

I am enclosing \$85.00 for each book, which includes shipping.

Please make checks payable to CBNA (Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska)

Credit Card purchases can be made by calling the Alaskan Shepherd Business Office at 907-374-9532 or mail to

CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA (our legal title): 1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-5199

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

200907 F92

**Yes, please send _____ copy(ies) of *A Kindly Providence*
written by *Father Louis L. Renner, S.J.***

I am enclosing \$35.00 for each book, which includes shipping.

Please make checks payable to CBNA (Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska)

Credit Card purchases can be made by calling the Alaskan Shepherd Business Office at 907-374-9532 or mail to

CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA (our legal title): 1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-5199

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

200907 F921

All donors are truly co-missionaries, since they alone make possible our work for the Lord and His Kingdom.

TO: CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA (our legal title):

1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-5199

Date _____ 2009

Dear Bishop Kettler:

As a member of the Alaskan Shepherd **"Buck-A-Month Club"** I enclose my contribution of \$ _____ OR I have already contributed but please accept this additional donation of \$ _____ to be used where most needed.

Name _____

Street No. /P.O.Box _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

If donating by check please make payable to: CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA or CBNA

If donating by credit card: NAME AS LISTED ON CREDIT CARD: _____

TYPE OF CARD (Visa, Master Card or Discover Cards only): VISA _____ MASTER CARD _____ DISCOVER _____

AMOUNT OF GIFT: \$ _____

CREDIT CARD NUMBER: (Strictly confidential): _____ EXP DATE: _____

SIGNATURE: _____



Through prayer we are joined together with those who generously support this Missionary Diocese of Fairbanks. This month we offer our annual novena to the patroness of the missions of Alaska, St. Therese, "The Little Flower."

Please join us (*September 23-October 1*), by praying the following prayer, as we pray for your intentions: *"O Lord, Who said, 'Unless you become as little children you shall not enter the Kingdom of*

Heaven,' GRANT US, WE BESEECH YOU, the grace to so follow in the way of Blessed Therese in humility and simplicity that through her intercession these petitions and those of all our members may be granted as part of the shower of roses she promised to send upon this earth."

We will remember you and your intentions during our Novena and in our weekly Masses, which we celebrate on Thursday. If you wish us to pray for your loved ones or any special intentions, please send these to us.



Your first class stamp donations are greatly appreciated.
(First class stamps have increased to 44¢)



Thanks too for your Box Tops donations for the Catholic Schools of Fairbanks!



Top: Father Stanislaw Jaszek poses with a group of First Communicants. Middle: Bishop Donald J. Kettler travels to Aniak to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation. Bottom: Liz Murphy, Parish Administrator, takes time to arrange flowers for the altar.

ins, bringing communion to the dying. Together with Liz, they serve the community by nourishing the faith of the people and reminding others of the importance of God in our lives. Among their most important responsibilities as Eucharistic ministers is the outreach shown, when there is a death in the village. Because the availability of a priest cannot be guaranteed, our local ministers move into action.

As is our custom, when somebody dies in the village, depending on the circumstances, the body of the deceased usually remains in the family home, laid out and surrounded by family and friends. People begin to bring food and supplies to feed those who will be visiting the home over the next several days. Our ministers from St. Theresa quickly visit the house, where the body is. When ready, they lead those gathered in prayer and bless the body with holy water. In the evenings, many people will gather and the parish ministers will lead the community in the rosary, followed by singing of hymns and songs. Over the course of 2 days, they give support to those grieving and direct the planning for the Funeral Service. On the third day, the body is then transferred to the church where it will rest for another night. Again, our Parish ministers lead the prayers of transfer and reception into the church. In the case where there is no priest available, they themselves will preside over the Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion and perform many of the funeral rites, which are so meaningful to our Catholic faith and comforting to the families. They then accompany the body to the place of burial and perform the final burial rites at the graveside.

Another moment of Aniak pride is the ability of our local Eucharistic ministers to prepare and lead the Holy Week Services in the absence of a priest. For three years now, our parish has been without a priest for Holy Week. Still, people will gather to celebrate this most sacred week because of our ministers. This recent Easter, 2009, saw the biggest crowd at these services in three years.

Aniak is indeed lucky to have such dedicated ministers to step forward and lead the faith community, which sees a priest about 6 times a year. And although

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. A suggested wording: "I give, devise and bequeath to the Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska, 1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska..."



Sister Marian Leaf, O.S.F., ministers musically to the children of St. Theresa parish.

Photo by Michael Lehnert

St. Theresa's struggles with a small community and few people able to be actively involved with the parish, Angie, Carl and Liz do an amazing job. And little sparks of hope keep popping up, mostly among the children. Last year, for the first time in 8 years, the parish witnessed three young women receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. For the first time ever, Aniak had an interested youth who attended a regional youth retreat in Bethel. Angie, who also doubles as our current catechist, prepared a group of nine children for their First Holy Communion on May 10, 2009. It was a thrill to watch these young members, who are so eager to learn about their faith, gather for their First Reconciliation back in March.

St. Theresa Parish has witnessed close to 20 baptisms in the past several years. And, two years ago, for the first time in seven years, there was a marriage blessing in our parish. Little sparks of hope keep rising out of a quiet, yet faithful, commitment, a steady witness to the importance of faith in the lives of our local parish ministers.

As for me, who claims Aniak as, well, a part-time home? My name is Sr. Marian and I work with Fr. Stan in

visiting our five parishes. My ministry is that of "Parish Facilitator." As I visit each parish, I work with the local ministers and catechists to support and encourage *their* ministry. It is part pastoral, part administrative, but as totally rewarding as it is challenging. I believe one of my most important roles is that of being a witness to the courage, faith, and dedication of our local parish leaders, not only in Aniak, but also in the four other parishes where I serve and throughout our region of the diocese. I am here to be a witness to the hardships and challenges our parish leaders accept and endure and to ensure that the Catholic faith is not lost during this time of so few priests and sisters and to ensure that the faith is passed on to the next generation. These local ministers have taken the responsibility to be an anchor of hope in uncertain and changing times, not only in the church, but also in the world.

St. Theresa's Parish in Aniak is indeed blessed to have such ministers. Our prayer is that our community can respond to such faith in action.



"We are blessed to have so many supporters who make our work possible. I want to especially thank those of you who remember us in your prayers. Donations provide tangible benefits, but the power of prayer and the Lord's grace is our bedrock. Thank you with all our hearts." --Bishop Donald J. Kettler