

North to Alaska



Dear Mission Friends:

In March I took a trip to Anchorage, Alaska to visit our Dominican friars at Holy Family Cathedral, where we have served since 1974. We are well known in and around Anchorage for our preaching as well as our commitment to the marginalized of the area through our various social ministries.

A primary concern, however, of both the Archdiocese of Anchorage and the Diocese of Fairbanks has long been the incapacity to supply priests to the outlying and isolated native settlements scattered throughout the state and up and down the Bering Sea coastline. These villages remain underdeveloped and unconnected by roads due to their rugged, icy terrain and almost perpetually foul weather—even the sea is frozen during the winter months!



In the 1880s, Jesuit missionaries brought the faith to the northern Inuit (Esquimo) people, but now there are no more resident priests in many of the villages. **The people go for long periods of time without Mass or the sacraments or the counseling of a priest in time of need, and they feel quite abandoned by the Church.**

Over the years, while visiting Holy Family in Anchorage to give retreats and mission appeals, I've traveled to some of the remote villages, offering talks and counseling and spending the night in a couple homes. While my time there was limited, I still vividly recall the unsettling amounts of depression and desperation, often manifested in alcoholism

and domestic violence, especially during the long, dark winter months. The presence of a priest was greatly appreciated.

Our friars at Holy Family Cathedral Parish (*above*) have begun the struggle to fulfill this great and troubling need. They have secured a promise from our Province to send priests to some of these communities to celebrate Christmas and Easter liturgies and other major solemnities, thereby easing the arduous load of the local deacons. And the Holy Family friars themselves have made a commitment to free up one or two priests once a month to journey to villages on a rotating basis to celebrate weekend Masses and the sacraments and to officiate at funerals.

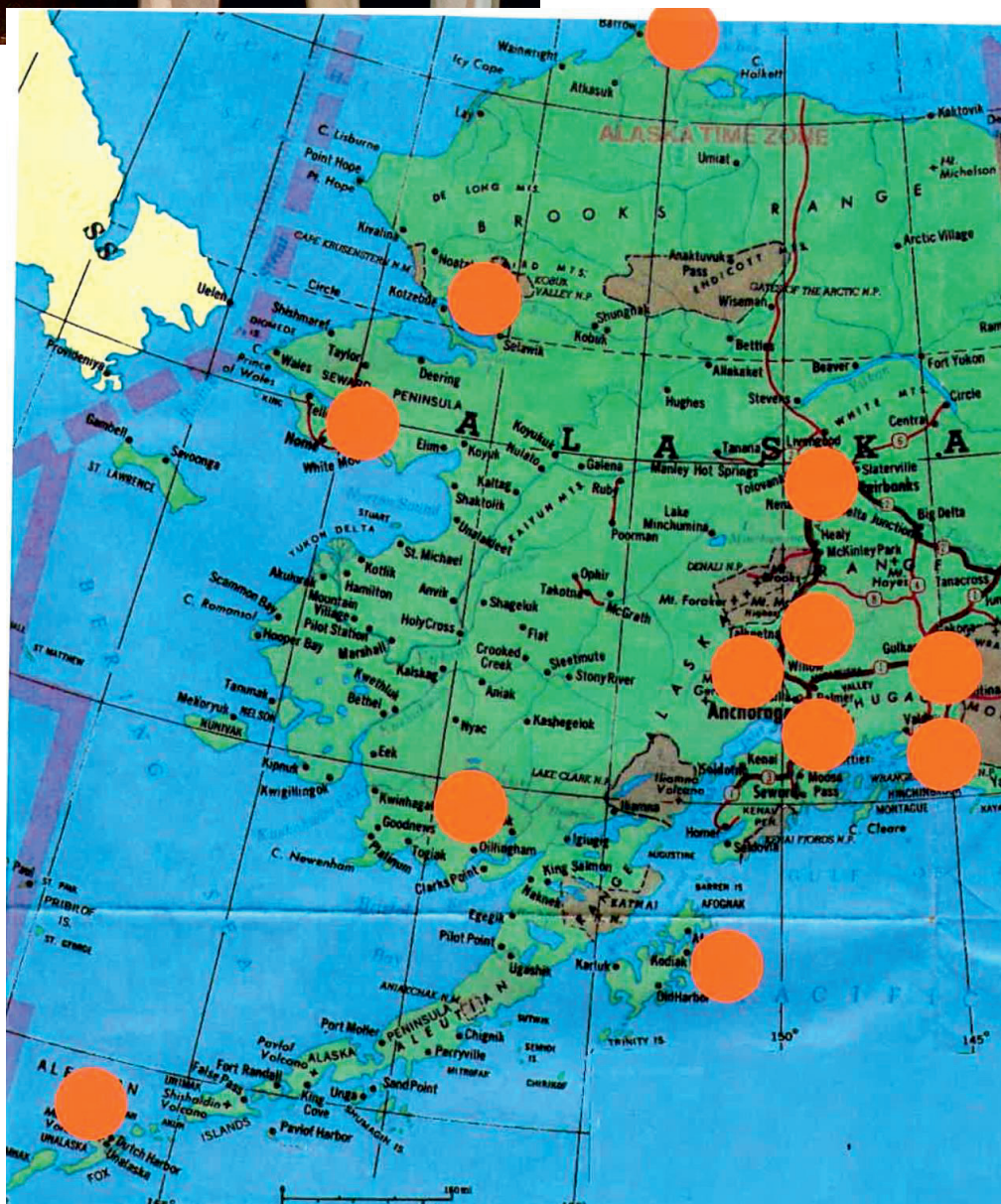


I was very disappointed that I wouldn't be able to meet with the parish community there, but I did do some exploring and was able to find the very place where my father lived and worked during his post there 106 years ago. I was also able to visit some other sites and meet some interesting locals.

Left, the staff at Holy Family Cathedral Parish in their house chapel: Fr. Pius Youn, OP; Fr. Dismas Sayre, OP; Fr. Steven Maekawa, OP (pastor); Fr. Andrew Opsahl, OP; Br. Andrew Thomas Kang, OP.

Over the past year they have made over 65 mission trips to 20 different isolated communities from Barrow in the north to Dutch Harbor in the south (see map).

On my recent visit, Fr. Steven Maekawa, O.P., pastor, invited me to take the weekend ministry in Dutch Harbor/Unalaska, which actually is home to the only Catholic parish in the 1,100 mile-long chain of the Aleutian Islands. I was happy and excited to go, not only because I am, as you know, a bit of the adventurer, but also because my father used to recount stories of his being sent to Dutch Harbor in 1914 to help set up a government radio station (see page 4). Unfortunately, however, after flying the 800 miles through snow and rain and wind from Anchorage out to Dutch Harbor/Unalaska, I was met with the news that all Masses and celebrations had been cancelled indefinitely due to the coronavirus.



After returning to Mexicali and obtaining the permission of Fr. Christopher Fadok, O.P., our provincial, I have pledged the Mission Foundation's support of the Dominican friars at Holy Family Cathedral Parish in their efforts to extend their ministry to as many of the isolated Catholic communities as possible.

We humbly ask for your prayers and support for our new mission in Alaska.

In Christ's peace,
Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.



Top, the entrance from the sea to Dutch Harbor/Unalaska; left, the crew of a local fishing boat ready to set off in hope of a good catch of Alaska crab; above, some friendly locals joining me for a photo; below left, the interior of the Russian Orthodox Church (middle) in Dutch Harbor, built in 1825; below right, St. Christopher by the Sea, the only Catholic Church in the entire Aleutian Islands.



Battle of Dutch Harbor

In 1914, the U.S. government dispatched 50 men, one of whom was my father Vincent, to Dutch Harbor off Amaknak Island, one of the Aleutian Islands in Alaska, to set up a radio station. Years later, a rudimentary naval base was installed, anchored by the radio station, and in May of 1942, naval intelligence codebreakers working from the station intercepted and decoded a message revealing an impending attack on Dutch Harbor. And indeed, on June 3 of that year, 20 enemy planes bombed the harbor, marking the first aerial attack in the continental U.S. by a foreign power during World War II. The radio station and oil storage tanks were targeted, but because our troops had been forewarned and had been on high alert, enemy pilots were shocked by anti-aircraft fire and the strikes weren't as destructive as they could have been.



2020 Mission Appeals...

...have of course been affected by the directives regarding the coronavirus pandemic. Dioceses have either suspended our parish assignments until further notice or postponed them to next year. Fr. Martin and those who assist him in preaching these appeals will greatly miss seeing old friends and meeting new ones this summer. We will be sure to update you as information becomes available, as mission appeals have always been a major source of funding of our missions.

May God bless all of you and your loved ones with adaptability, patience, love, and good health during this extraordinary time.



A Father's Day Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Today we ask you to bless our earthly fathers for the many times they reflected the love, strength, gentleness, and wisdom that you exemplify.

We honor our fathers for putting our needs above their own convenience and comfort; for teaching us to show courage and patience in the face of adversity; for challenging us to move beyond self-limiting boundaries; for modeling the qualities that would turn us into responsible, principled, caring adults.

We ask your blessing on those men who served as father figures in our lives. May the love and selflessness they showed us be returned to them, and help them to know that their influence has changed us for the better.

Give new and future fathers the guidance they need to raise happy and holy children, grounded in a love for God and other people; and remind these fathers that treating women with dignity, compassion, and respect is one of the greatest gifts they can give their children.

We pray that our fathers who have passed into the next life have been welcomed into your loving embrace.

In union with St. Joseph, whom you entrusted with your Son, we ask your generous blessings today and every day. Amen.

~based on a prayer by Tony Rossi