



# The Alaskan Shepherd

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*Some give by going to the Missions*

*Some go by giving to the Missions*

*Without both there are no Missions*

## IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH IN FAIRBANKS CELEBRATES A CENTURY OF FAITH: 1904-2004

On Sunday June 6, 2004, Immaculate Conception parish, Fairbanks, celebrated a century of faith not only in the name of the members of "the little church" on the banks of the Chena River, but, in reality, also in the name of the entire Diocese of Fairbanks. Temperatures soared well past 80 degrees that momentous afternoon. Festivities included a ceremonial march, led by Bishop Donald J. Kettler, from the original location of the church on the south bank to its present-day location on the north bank. The Mass was celebrated outdoors to accommodate the immense gathering. Concelebrants included current pastor since 1998, Father Richard McCaffrey, S.J., Father John McBride, S.J., pastor from 1967-1968, Father Joseph Laudwein, S.J., pastor from 1985-1987, newly ordained Father Sean Thomson, Deacon Robert Mantei, Deacon Robert Barnard and Deacon Sean Stack.

Bishop Kettler delivered a moving homily, in which he said: *We remember today the many journeys this parish has taken--a century of faith, one hundred years of journeying under the caring guidance and service of the Jesuits; a hundred years of cultural change and growth. A journey of bringing medical care to the community; a journey of bringing Catholic education to many; today, a journey of bringing food and clothing and love to the needy. Even the "Little Church" itself had a journey from the other side of the river to this side. We are a journeying people and we are grateful today for the opportunity of one hundred years of journeying.*

Today, as we continue this journey, where we have been and where we are going, I invite you to think about a special journey, as individuals and members of different cultures and heritages, as family and as parish and church community. This is a journey that you have already begun, but one which will last for a lifetime.

The journey with Jesus will last a lifetime. It means walking in the presence of the Lord. It means listening to his message. You heard it today in the Sacred readings. Wear truthfulness and integrity and stand up and work for peace and justice, especially right here at home. Be wise and have self



*Bishop Donald Kettler and Father Richard McCaffrey lead parishioners in a march from the south bank of the Chena River over "Friendship Bridge" to the present location on the north bank where Immaculate Conception Church now stands. They are followed by newly ordained Father Sean Thomson, Deacon Robert Mantei, and hundreds of parishioners and friends. The walk on June 6, 2004, commemorates the historic moving of the church in 1911.*  
(All photos by Patty Walter)

control. Most of all believe in the power of God in your lives. Without faith each of us will be lost and alone on the side of the road. But by going out and choosing to take the journey, you show others the dream that you have--where God dwells among his people. Where we are his people and he is our God and he shall wipe every tear from our eyes. Congratulations Immaculate Conception parish and people. You have journeyed well. Please continue on the journey. God bless you.

A truly inspiring and memorable part of the Centennial Mass was the recitation of The Lord's Prayer.

**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.***



*Parishioners flock to Immaculate Conception Church on June 6, 2004, in Fairbanks to celebrate 100 years of faith. With temperatures exceeding 80 degrees, many sought the shade of the surrounding birch trees.*

Fourteen parishioners and friends came forward to pray the Our Father in their native tongue. A beautiful diversion of cultures became more evident with each interpretation. The prayer was heard in Koyukon (Athabaskan), Gwich'in (Athabaskan), Yup'ik (Eskimo), Inupiaq (Eskimo), Korean, German, Czech, Spanish, Latin, Italian, Slovenian, Gaelic, Scandinavian, and French.

The history of the Catholic Church in Fairbanks began on July 1, 1904, when Father Francis M. Monroe, S.J., first arrived there. Standing alone on the banks of the Chena River that day, he found himself—in the words of one historian—"penniless, landless and forlorn." He wasted no time on self-pity. The day after his arrival, he offered the first Mass offered in Fairbanks, in a "private house." On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, a Sunday, he offered the first public Mass offered in Fairbanks, in the District Court Building. The year 1904 marks the founding of Immaculate Conception parish. Its first Mass was offered on the Feast of All Saints, November 1, 1904.

An article appearing in *Jessen's Weekly* for Thursday, July 8, 1954, delivered this coverage of the founding of Immaculate Conception: *Following the discovery of gold by Felix Pedro, several thousand people rushed into the promising area and among them were many Catholics. The price of real estate and labor was beyond the means of the Jesuits, so a group of local men organized for the purpose of raising the necessary finances for a church. A rough 65 by 30-foot structure was erected at the cost of \$6512.00. A keg of eight-penny nails cost \$50.00 at the time. "Father Monroe traveled all over the mining camps and around in Interior Alaska soliciting help and finally raised \$4795.75. This, added to the \$3051.00 the committee of men had collected, enabled*

*the missionary to pay off the debt and decorate the church and also install a small library along with his living quarters. Not a few people in the camp criticized Father severely for what they thought was too large a building, saying there would never be enough Catholics in Fairbanks to justify the size.*

Concerned not only for the souls of his parishioners but also for their bodily health, Father Monroe undertook the building of a hospital. This—named for St. Joseph—he built on the north side of the Chena River a little downstream from the church. By November 18, 1906, the 40-bed hospital was ready to admit its first patients, 35 of them. Sisters of St. Ann were part of the hospital staff from September 30, 1906, to June 23, 1907. They were replaced by Benedictine Sisters, who helped staff the hospital, for the next three years. On October, 1, 1910, Sisters of Providence undertook to operate St. Joseph's Hospital. This they did until it closed in 1968.

With the church and the hospital on opposite sides of the Chena, Father Monroe saw himself faced with a dilemma. As church-related and hospital-related work increased, he found himself spending too much time between the two. The two structures needed to be side by side. Beginning in 1909, Father Joseph R. Crimont, S.J., began to serve, for several years, as pastor of Immaculate Conception parish. With him, Father Monroe discussed the problem. "Move the church!" was Father Crimont's directive.

Though not a professional engineer, Father Monroe was resourceful, and a man possessed of practical good judgment. He determined that the church could be moved across the river next to the hospital. Townspeople were skeptical, thinking such a move impossible. But, Father Monroe had a plan, as simple as it was ingenious. When the Chena froze solid enough to bear the weight of the church, he drew two parallel lines 30 feet apart on the ice. Holes were cut through the ice at eight foot intervals along these lines. Upright logs were wedged into these holes and left to freeze in solid. The following day, the tops of these were sawed off two feet above the ice, making strong supports for heavy timbers. On these the church was rolled diagonally some 400 feet across the frozen river to its present site. Here the building was raised up high enough to allow for a full basement. That was in late November, 1911.

In the early spring of 1912, the rough work on the basement parish hall was completed, and a two-story residence for priests and Brothers—measuring 34 x 36 feet—added. Brother Joseph Coté, S.J., came to Fairbanks that summer and assisted greatly by doing all the wiring, the painting of the residence, and much of the plumbing work.

In the early spring of 1914, the roof of the church was given a steeper pitch. The additional five feet in height made possible a choir loft. At the same time, a belfry was added to the front elevation of the church, and a bigger than life-size statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception was placed above the front doors. The whole interior of the church was to be finished with fleur-de-lis embossed decorative tin. Father Monroe was depending on Brother Coté for this task, but he was recalled by his Superior in

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, Business Administrator: 907-374-9528.





*Celebrants for the centennial Mass include left to right: Deacon Robert Mantei, Father Richard McCaffrey, S.J., Deacon Sean Stack, Bishop Donald Kettler, Deacon Robert Barnard, Father Sean Thomson, Father Joseph Laudwein, S.J., and Father John McBride, S.J.*

Canada, and Father Monroe had to do much of the work himself, until Brother Thomas Callahan, S.J., came and rendered much assistance.

During the winter of 1921-22, Father S. Aloysius Eline, S.J., was in Fairbanks, where Father Monroe was ailing and needed an assistant. From 1924—the year Father Monroe left Fairbanks—until 1926, and from 1928 until 1941, when, because of failing health, he became assistant to Father Joseph F. McElmeel, S.J., for a year, Father Eline was the much loved, highly respected pastor of Immaculate Conception parish. Despite temperatures 60 degrees below zero, he began his term as pastor with the Forty Hours Devotion, the first time that devotion had been held in Alaska. During those days, he sang a High Mass every morning, with the Sisters from the hospital and some of the parishioners forming the choir. Father Eline—after being a virtual invalid for several years in St. Joseph’s hospital—died there on April 20, 1943. He lies buried in Fairbanks’ Clay Street Cemetery.

During the years 1926-28, Father Patrick J. O’Reilly, S.J., served as pastor of Immaculate Conception parish. It is thanks to his efforts that the church has the beautiful stained glass windows that so brighten it to the present day. And it is thanks to his efforts that the church did not burn to the ground, in March, 1927—that it has, instead, a brick chimney and a concrete porch. A reliable history manuscript in the

Jesuit Oregon Province Archives informs us: *During the Novena of Grace in March the chimney in the parish rectory caught fire. The chimney was a stovepipe from the furnace going through three floors of the frame structure. Father O’Reilly, who was alone in the house at the time, fought the blaze for 30 minutes, and eventually got it under control. Accordingly, in the summer of 1927, he built a brick chimney, 38 feet high. He rented an old brick machine, and, with the help of a laborer, made the bricks out of cement and very fine sand and gravel. He built also a concrete porch, and laid 900 square feet of cement walk.*

After Father O’Reilly, Father John F. Hayes, S.J., spent a short time as pastor of the parish, from November, 1928, to August 29, 1929. His contribution to the changing aspect of the church structure was the building of the back stairs, and the converting of one of the upstairs rectory rooms into a small chapel. Today this room—with a glassed-in front looking out into the sanctuary, and outfitted with a loud-speaker—serves as “The Baby Room.”

Father William G. Elliott, S.J., was pastor of Immaculate Conception parish for the year 1942-43. While in Fairbanks, he also organized the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary. “Fairbanks is blessed to have him here,” wrote Bishop Walter J. Fitzgerald, S.J. From 1939-45, Bishop Fitzgerald made his headquarters at Immaculate Conception Church; and, when not traveling, rendered the parish many useful services.

During the 1940s, also the following Jesuit Fathers served Immaculate Conception parish as pastors: Joseph A. Balfe, Louis B. Fink, Clifford Allbutt, Donald McDonald, and Edmund A. Anable. They had as assistants Fathers Joseph P. Farrell, John W. Laux, and McElmeel.

It was while Father McDonald was pastor of Immaculate Conception parish, from 1946-48, that Immaculate Conception Grade School, at the request of the parishioners, came into being. Classes began in the basement of the church on September 3, 1946, with kindergarten and grades one through four. Fifty-five children were enrolled. Two Sisters of Providence, Joan of Providence and Ignatia Marie, were the first teachers. Each succeeding year the next higher grade was added. The first graduating class, numbering eight, graduated in 1951.

By 1951, the school had long since outgrown its basement facilities. That spring and summer, Father Anable—who had replaced Father McDonald as pastor, in late 1947—supervised the construction of the new school. This was built in Slaterville, out of six used barracks bought from the city. The new school had eight classrooms and a

*During the month of November, the month of Holy Souls, please remember in your Masses and prayers the following departed:*\_\_\_\_\_

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## CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA

ALASKAN SHEPHERD  
1312 PEGER ROAD  
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709-5199

Dear Friends of the Missionary Diocese of Fairbanks:

Fifty-eight years ago, in September 1946, under the supervision of Father Edmund Anable, S.J., and the Sisters of Providence, fifty-five 1st-4th grade students began classes in the basement of Fairbanks' historic Immaculate Conception Church. In 1951, six construction camp buildings and the old army officers club were moved to a site on Noyes Slough. These buildings, arranged under a single roof, became the home of Immaculate Conception School and of 115 elementary students. In 1955, the first 9th grade class met at Immaculate Conception Church. In 1956, a \$400,000 high school, named after Father Francis Monroe, S.J., founder of the first Catholic Parish in Fairbanks, was completed and opened. On May 29, 1959, Alaska was celebrating its first year of statehood, as Fairbanks' Monroe Catholic High School graduated its first senior class, a class of six. By 1978, enough funding had been secured for construction of a two-story elementary school. In 1980, the first parent-funded kindergarten was held. Today, there are 450 students reaping the benefits of a Catholic education in Fairbanks.



*"Our Catholic schools can be a primary tool for evangelization and catechesis. My goal is to see that this in fact happens here in Fairbanks."*  
—Bishop Donald Kettler

Immaculate Conception School and Monroe High School comprise the only K-12 Catholic school system in Alaska. Situated in Fairbanks, just 100 miles south of the Arctic Circle, these schools educate students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some live within walking distance, others travel 25 miles by bus or car, and still others have left their home villages and towns to board in Fairbanks to attend a Catholic school. The Catholic Schools of Fairbanks provide an educational environment that is rooted in faith, rich in academic excellence, strengthened by service and nurtured by community.

Until the 1980's, ICS and Monroe employed a large number of Religious, both men and women, and members of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. In the last 20 years, the JVC has turned its resources to other areas and there has been a significant decline in the number of Religious. The Religious and the volunteers donated a tremendous amount of time and energy at a very low cost. The increases in educational costs have gone largely to paying teachers and staff.

That is why we find ourselves knocking at your door. Contributing to the Catholic Schools of Fairbanks will ensure that the schools will be able to pay for textbooks, computer supplies, salaries, maintenance costs, and other costs associated with running a school. Additionally, your donation will help keep tuitions at affordable levels so that more families will be able to have the choice in the education of their children. Finally, you will be part of a tradition of giving--dating back to 1946, when the schools opened in the basement of Immaculate Conception church.

With all sincere, grateful, best wishes,

Donald J. Kettler  
Bishop of Fairbanks

TO: CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA

1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709 DATE 2004 06 F12

**Dear Bishop Kettler:**

Enclosed is my special donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to the *Catholic Schools of Fairbanks Annual Fund*, a fund intended exclusively to help alleviate operational costs at the school.

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principal's office. For almost three decades, the barracks school served its purpose well. The years, however, exacted their toll. The school simply needed to be replaced. This was done, in 1979, with the construction of a new two-story building.

In 1952, Father George T. Boileau, S.J., became pastor of Immaculate Conception parish. One of his priorities was to see to the bringing about of a Catholic high school. Named for Father Monroe, Monroe Catholic High School had its beginnings—as did the grade

school—in the basement of Immaculate Conception Church in the fall of 1955, with an enrollment of nine students in the freshman class. Father Bernard F. McMeel, S.J., was its first principal. On September 2, 1956, the new high school—built next to the grade school—was dedicated and ready to receive its first freshmen and sophomore classes, numbering 32. Father Lewis N. Doyle, S.J., was its first principal, and Sister Dorothy—a Sister of Providence—was the first Sister to teach at it. To begin with, Monroe had for a gymnasium only a small, unheated Quonset hut. This was replaced, in 1966, by the new, modern gymnasium, named “Boileau Hall” in honor of Bishop Boileau. Two library-classrooms were added to the high school building in 1960.

August 8, 1962, is a date of major significance for the whole of Alaska, but especially for Fairbanks. On that day the Diocese of Fairbanks was officially established. Being directly under Rome's Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, it is a “missionary diocese.” Francis D. Gleeson, S.J.—Vicar Apostolic of Alaska, prior to that date—became the first Ordinary of the Diocese of Fairbanks. Spatially the Diocese of Fairbanks comprises 409, 849 square miles. This includes all the area of the State of Alaska north of the Alaska Range from the Canadian border on the east to the Bering and Chukchi Seas on the west. Out of a total population of around 155,224, the diocese serves almost 20,000 people, distributed throughout 46 Catholic communities of varying sizes. Only nine of these are accessible by road. Forty to 45 percent of the membership of the Diocese of Fairbanks is Alaska Native, Eskimo and Indian, with Eskimos in the majority. The people in the western part of the diocese are served also by the diocese-owned radio station, KNOM, and by the diocese-supported Native Ministry Program located at St. Marys. The communities along the middle Yukon River are served by the Interior Ministry Study Program located at Galena. Succeeding Bishop Gleeson as Ordinary of the Diocese of Fairbanks have been Bishops Robert L. Whelan, S.J., November 30, 1968 to July 28, 1985; Michael J. Kaniecki, S.J., July 28, 1985,



*Bishop Donald Kettler and Father Sean Thomson look on as The Lord's Prayer is recited first in Yup'ik and then in Koyukon, Gwich'in, Korean, German, Czech, Spanish, Latin, Italian, Slovenian, Gaelic, Scandinavian, French, and Inupiaq.*

to the day of his death, August 6, 2000; and Donald J. Kettler, August 22, 2002, to the present. With Sister Eileen Brown, S.N.J.M., as Diocesan Chancellor, from 1985-1992, the Diocese of Fairbanks was one of the very first dioceses in the country to have a woman chancellor.

Though Fairbanks was a See city as of August 8, 1962, it had no cathedral church. Till such was built, Immaculate Conception Church—often, and fondly, referred to as “the little church”—had to serve as the

Diocese of Fairbanks' Pro-Cathedral. In it, as such, a history-making event took place, on April 24, 1965. On that day, Angus McDonald was ordained a priest in it, the one and only man ever to be ordained a priest in it. He was also the first man to be ordained for the Diocese of Fairbanks. The event was history-making also, inasmuch as Father McDonald was the first priest in the United States to be ordained with the liturgy in English rather than in the traditional Latin.

In 1954, Immaculate Conception parish celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding. At that time it was still the only Catholic parish in the Fairbanks area. And by that time its church had already become much too small for the number of its parishioners. As many as eight Masses a weekend had to be offered to accommodate them. Eight years later, as mentioned, the Diocese of Fairbanks was established, bringing with it the need for a cathedral worthy of the name. Both of these considerations made the construction of a new church building urgent.

Official ground breaking ceremonies for the new church, “the Farthest North Cathedral,” took place in May, 1962, at the corner of Airport Way and Peger Road. The building took shape slowly, according to available finances and the supply of volunteer labor. Father James C. Spils, S.J., was the designer of the 55' x 170' building and the construction superintendent. To help him with the project, he brought with him some of the work crew that had assisted him so ably, when he built Copper Valley School. While the building did take shape slowly, it did reach the stage, where it was ready for the Palm Sunday Mass, on April 3, 1966. It was formally dedicated by Bishop Gleeson on the feast of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, June 17, 1966. It was dedicated to the Sacred Heart, in keeping with the wishes of Bishop Gleeson.

Father Anable was the first Rector of the Cathedral, 1966-67. At this time there was still only one parish in Fairbanks, but now with two churches, Immaculate Conception Church and Sacred Heart Cathedral. During the year 1967-68, Father John

E. Gurr, S.J., served as Rector of the Cathedral, and Father John P. McBride, S.J., as pastor of Immaculate Conception. During the latter part of 1968, Bishop Whelan—Coadjutor Bishop of Fairbanks at the time—served as pastor of Immaculate Conception parish and as Rector of the Cathedral. On January 1, 1969, the Fairbanks parish was canonically divided into Immaculate Conception and Sacred Heart Cathedral parishes. Father Francis E. Mueller, S.J., was appointed administrator of the latter parish, until August of 1969, when Father Francis W. McGuigan, S.J., became its pastor.

In the early 1990s, an atmosphere bordering on crisis pervaded much of the Immaculate Conception parish community. At the root of it all was the size of the church. It was too small—as it had been for decades—to meet the needs of the parish. When Father Andrew L. Maddock, S.J., became pastor of the parish, in August, 1993, he found himself in the midst of a controversy created, when it was announced that the Diocese of Fairbanks was again considering closing Immaculate Conception Church and merging the parish with that of Sacred Heart Cathedral. Brought in to give a two-year lead time to work out the details of this possible merger, Father Maddock asked to hear from the people. He found that many of the parishioners had a strong desire to keep their parish alive, and in the downtown area. Through a process of informational meetings, letters and voting, the majority of the voting parishioners opted to buy available land adjacent to the church's present site and to build a new church, preserving the little church as a downtown chapel. But, there were serious concerns on the part of some about the prudence of building a new church so relatively close to Sacred Heart Cathedral. Others feared that the close community feeling would be lost in a new structure. To the relief of many, when all was said—nothing was done. The status quo of the parish has remained what it was to the present day. To ease somewhat the space problem, Masses on bigger feast days continued to be offered in the Catholic schools' gymnasium. Since the completion of the Holy Family Chapel at the Catholic schools complex, in the year 2000, such Masses have been offered there.

Catholic Church history in Fairbanks began with Father Monroe in 1904, when he founded Immaculate Conception parish. A century later, it is still a flourishing parish. Since October, 1998, Father McCaffrey has been its pastor. In addition



to the pastors mentioned above, other priests, all Jesuits, have served the parish in that capacity. From 1968-84, Fathers Lawrence A. Nevue and Cornelius K. Murphy—now one, now the other—were pastors. From 1984-87, Father Joseph E. Laudwein was pastor. He was followed by Father Kevin T. Clarke, 1987-90; who was followed by Father William J. Loyens, 1990-93; who was, in turn, followed by Father Maddock, 1993-98. Over the years, other priests have served as assistants or associates in the parish, sometimes only for a year: Julius Jetté, Philibert Turnell, William McMillan, James U. Conwell, William H. Babb, Henry G. Hargreaves, Segundo Llorente, John E. Gurr, Joseph L. Hebert, Robert F. Corrigan, J. Herbert Mead, Arthur Lopilato, and Theodore N. Fortier.

Immaculate Conception parish is being served also by deacons: Rev. Mr. Robert Mantei, since 1986; Rev. Mr. Sean J. Stack, since 1999; and Rev. Mr. Robert Barnard, since 2003.

In addition to Brothers Coté and Callahan, mentioned above, three other Jesuit lay Brothers served at Immaculate Conception parish:

Joseph V. O'Hare, 1906-08; Peter P. Wilhalm, 1916-20; and Carl F. Wickart, 1951-78.

Throughout its history, many lay people, too, have served, competently and generously, the Immaculate Conception parish and its programs.

In the Foreword to Immaculate Conception's Centennial brochure, Father McCaffrey reflects: *Since its founding in 1904 by Francis Monroe, S.J., the parish has continued to grow, thanks to the efforts of many priests deacons, religious sisters and brothers, and dedicated lay people, with God's help. What began a century ago as a dream in a rough gold mining camp has, in the course of a hundred years, seen the development of four additional parishes, a thriving Catholic grade school and high school, numerous social and civic organizations, as well as some 65 years of community health care through St. Joseph's Hospital. The former Territory of Alaska became the State of Alaska, the 49<sup>th</sup> state, on January 3, 1959, and the former mission territory of Northern Alaska became the Diocese of Fairbanks on August 8, 1962.*

*We've seen a lot of progress in the last 100 years, and we look forward to continued progress and development of our parish and parish programs under the guidance and leadership of the fourth and current Bishop of Fairbanks, Most Reverend Donald Kettler. May the Peace of God be with all of you!*

--Father Louis L. Renner, S.J./Patty Walter

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