



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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Spreading Light to the Darkest Corners



Fr. Steven Maekawa, O.P.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them”

(Luke 2:8-9).

Dear Mission Friends:

This month we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the light of God arriving in the world to dispel the darkness of sin and death by the blood of his Cross and the glory of his Resurrection. Here in Alaska, where it is literally the darkest time of the year, where we can have little to no daylight on a winter's day, our parishioners anxiously await the arrival of the light and glory of Jesus into their lives.

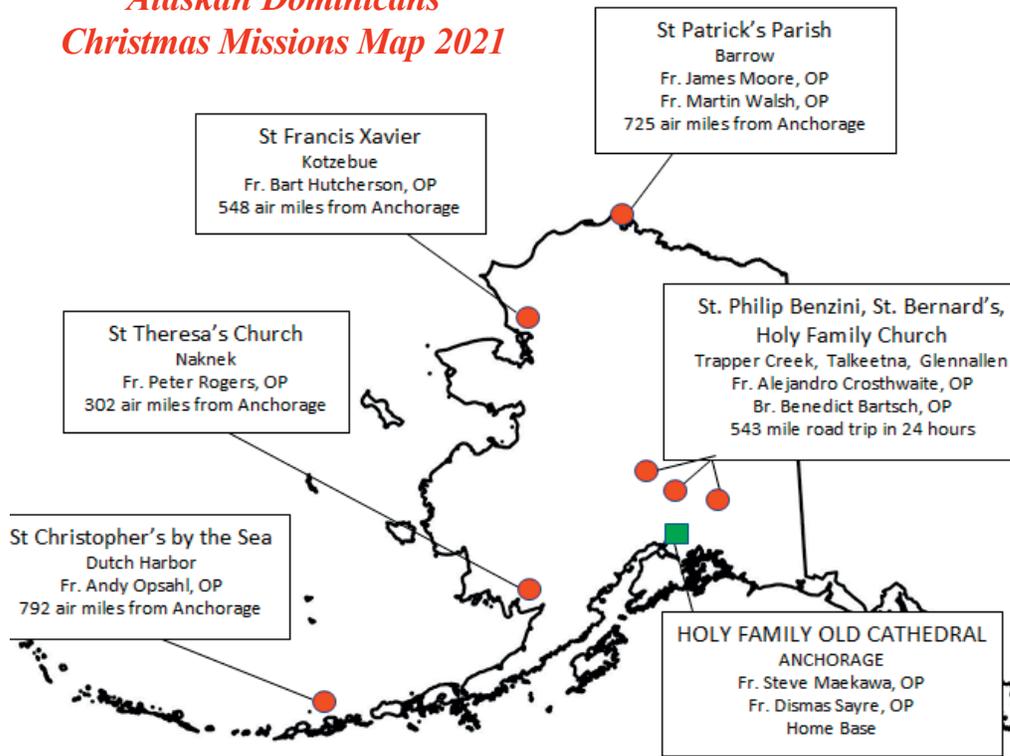


Whale Bone Arch in Barrow, Gateway to the Arctic Ocean.

Alaska prides itself as America's Last Frontier. Over twice the size of Texas but with a population of fewer than 750,000 people due to its vast, imposing terrain and extreme weather, the title is well-deserved. Many towns and villages are physically isolated from the outside world except for an airfield or a boat landing. And those communities on the road network are often hundreds of miles away from town. The area's winter weather averages -16 with a wind chill of -30. The first snows arrive at the end of October and even the sea is frozen for several months!

Having the Eucharist is a tremendous intervention of grace wherever and whenever a Mass is celebrated. Dominicans have served at Holy Family Old Cathedral in Anchorage since 1974 and we are known for our preaching and commitment to the faithful beyond our parish boundaries. But the Church in Alaska has always suffered from limited resources and a shortage of priests to serve the faithful and evangelize. Indeed, a primary concern of both the Archdiocese of Anchorage and the Diocese of Fairbanks has long been the challenge of supplying priests to the outlying and isolated towns and villages scattered throughout the state and up and down the Bering Sea coastline.

Alaskan Dominicans Christmas Missions Map 2021



Recently I began inviting priests from outside of Alaska to travel to some of these communities to celebrate Christmas and Easter liturgies as well as other major solemnities, thereby extending our reach and capabilities.

This year for our "Alaskan Dominicans Christmas Missions," four Dominican friars from California will join three of our Holy Family friars and, over a period of less than two weeks, will travel over 5,250 round trip miles from our parish in downtown Anchorage to seven isolated parishes and mission churches to celebrate Christmas Masses. Who are the friars going out on the Christmas missions and where are they going?

Many churches, including those in Talkeetna, Trapper Creek, Glennallen, and Dutch Harbor, have no resident priests and often go for months at a time without Mass, the sacraments, or the counseling of a priest in time of need. These parishioners can feel quite abandoned by the Church, especially during the long, dark winter months. And the few-and-far-between priests who do reside at their parishes, such as those in Fairbanks, are often stretched past their capabilities with little or no hope of relief.

Five years ago, the Dominicans at Holy Family made the commitment to help fulfill this great and troubling need, freeing up at least one priest every week to journey to each of the above outlying towns and more on a rotating basis to celebrate its weekend Masses.



Besides adding these "priestless" churches to our regular schedule, easing the arduous load of the local deacons, we also do our best to fulfill special requests for relief from local clergy. Our commitment to bringing the sacraments of the Church to the people of Alaska has now radiated to the far reaches of the state, and the presence of a priest is always greatly anticipated and appreciated.

Fr. Andy Opsahl, O.P., parochial vicar here at Holy Family, is going to Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands. Almost 800 miles west of Anchorage, St. Christopher's By the Sea, the western-most parish in the United States, does not have a priest. Fr. Andy goes there for five days every month but this year, as a Christmas missionary, he will be there for eleven days, December 16-27.



In early November, the pastor of St. Patrick's Parish in Barrow, on the Arctic Ocean—where there is no daylight from November to January—returned to his home diocese and a replacement is not expected until sometime in the spring. Being welcomed to this northern-most city in the United States from December 17-27 will be **Fr. James Moore, O.P.**, Vicar Provincial for Advancement for the Dominicans in the Western U.S. and **Fr. Martin Walsh, O.P.**, Director of our Western Dominican Mission Foundation, who has spent many years as a missionary in Mexico.

Fr. Peter Rodgers, O.P., president of our seminary in

Berkeley, the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, is going to St. Theresa's Parish in Naknek on the southeast edge of the Bering Sea. St. Theresa's is served twice a month by bush pilot priest Fr. Scott Garret. Fr. Peter will be there Dec 23-27.

Fr. Bartholomew Hutcherson, O.P., professor of homiletics at our seminary, the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, and mission band preacher, is going to Kotzebue in the far northwest of the state. Thirty-three miles above the Arctic Circle, St. Francis Xavier Parish has not had a resident priest—or a Christmas Mass—in four years. Fr. Bart will be there December 18-27.

Fr. Alejandro Crosthwaite, O.P., on sabbatical from teaching at the Angelicum in Rome, is in residence at Holy Family. On the afternoon of Christmas Eve, Fr. Alejandro and **Br. Benedict Mary Bartsch, O.P.**, a student brother in his pastoral residency year at Holy Family and also a 1st Lieutenant and chaplain candidate in the U.S. Army Reserve, will leave for what we call the "Sleigh Ride." They will drive 116 miles north of Anchorage to Trapper Creek to celebrate Mass and then another 30 miles to Talkeetna for a second Mass. They will then get up at 5am to drive 216 highway miles to Glennallen, arriving in time for the 10am Mass. (The sunrise there is 10:07 am and many of the faithful themselves will have driven 50 miles in the dark and sub-zero temperatures to get there.)

We serve each of these three church communities once a month, but ordinarily would not be able to visit all three on the same weekend. On their "Sleigh Ride," Fr. Alejandro and his wingman Br. Benedict will cover 543 miles in a little over 24 hours, allowing them to arrive home just in time for Christmas dinner.



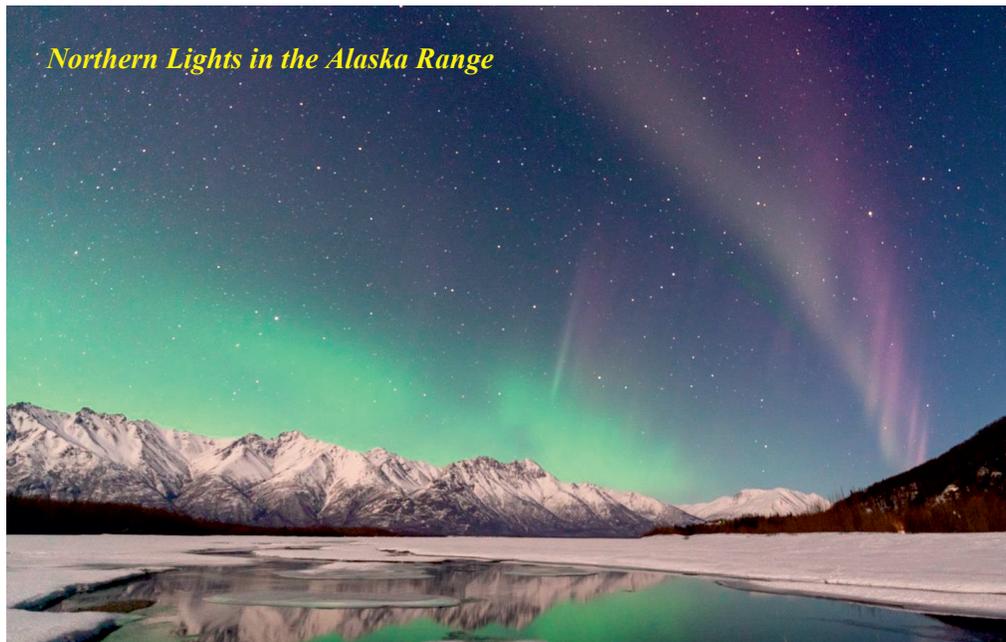
Celebrating the seven Christmas Masses back at Holy Family Old Cathedral will be **Fr. Dismas Sayre, O.P.**, one of our parish priests, who will be celebrant of the Masses in Spanish and Latin, and myself, the pastor.

The traveling friars will return to Anchorage when their assignments are over and will gather at the Holy Family rectory to celebrate the Christmas octave and enjoy prayer and meals together.

Please pray for the safety of the Dominicans as they travel by way of often treacherous roads or dark, precarious flights, and for the people they will serve, for whom the darkest days of winter will be alleviated as we commemorate with them the birth of the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Fr. Martin Walsh has pledged the Mission Foundation's support of the Dominican friars at Holy Family Cathedral Parish in our efforts to continue extending our ministry to as many of the isolated Catholic communities as possible. I thank you for your support of our ministry through the Mission Foundation as we endeavor to bring the Eucharist to all of the faithful in Alaska throughout the year.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Steven Maekawa, O.P.

What came to be through him was life and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:3-5).



Northern Lights in the Alaska Range

A Christmas Prayer

*Emmanuel, God with us, you chose to come for each person:
the destitute and the wealthy, the unfortunate and the privileged,
the troubled and the peaceful, the healthy and the ill.
You came in human form with a message of extravagant love,
showing us how to be with those who have much less than we do.
You came offering a gesture of respect and reverence instead of indifference;
giving courteous kindness in place of thoughtless disregard;
contributing ongoing support rather than merely a holiday handout.*

*Change my heart. Turn it inside out, toward the larger world.
Remind me daily of those who struggle with their basic existence.
Lead me to help change social systems that contribute to this ongoing struggle.
Enlarge my awareness. Increase my generosity. Guide my choices of how to live,
what I purchase, and how I use my material wealth.
Remind me often of your presence in those I tend to ignore or forget.
Boundless Love, thank you for cherishing each person on this planet.*

~Joyce Rupp

Greetings to our Mission Friends!

On behalf of our staff, Nancy Keating and Lesley Warnshuis, and myself, in thanksgiving for the gifts you so generously and selflessly bestow upon those we serve, please accept our humble gift in return: our daily prayers for a happy, healthy, and holy life, during this Christmastide and all year long.

May we all radiate the love of the newborn Babe—to each other in our own small worlds as well as to our larger world, which is so in need of His love. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

In Christ's peace,

Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.

