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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

KATERI TEKAKWITHA CENTER GALENA, ALASKA

Deacon Paul Perreault, Diocesan Engineer and a skilled pilot, directed the Cessna through the clouds. He pointed the small craft toward our destination of Galena and adjusted the gauges meticulously. Deacon Paul's flying efficiency and careful checklist procedure is eminent—but this was my first time as his passenger and I was impressed. He appeared to cover each inch, as he packed, secured, and battened down the aircraft, preparing for what would be a mere 267-nautical-mile trip to the Athabaskan village of Galena, on the right bank of the middle Yukon River. Besides supplies for the village, the Cessna transported Betty Johnson, Director of the Office of Worship, Madeline Nance, Director of the Children and Family Life Center, and me. Due to the clouds, we followed the river for most of the flight. Along the way, Deacon Paul pointed out landmarks, sites of interest, and the Diocese's current building project, a new church for the people of Ruby. An air of anticipation hung in the plane, as we were on our way to participate in a dedication ceremony of the new Kateri Tekakwitha Center. Bishop Donald Kettler would join us the next day, Sunday, August 31, 2003.

Deacon Paul guided the plane smoothly onto the airstrip, an airstrip first built in 1940 by the United States Army. The airstrip has helped to make Galena a commercial and transportation center for surrounding villages. The population has grown from 44 inhabitants in 1940 to 675 in 2000. We soon had the plane unloaded of its supplies and reloaded with outgoing paperwork. We bade goodbye to Deacon Paul who planned to return with passengers the following day and to participate in the celebration.

Sister Marilyn Marx, SNJM, former Chancellor and now Director of the Center, drove us from the airport to St. John Berchmans church. Galena, now a predominately Koyukon Athabaskan Indian community—35 miles east of Nulato—was established about 1920 as a supply point for the galena (lead ore) discovered in the area south of the Yukon. The name Galena first appears in Catholic Church records in 1921. Galena's first church was a saloon building barged down from Ruby in 1921 and transformed into a church—with priest's quarters added by 1923. In the



***Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, Lily of the Mohawks
1656-1680***

beginning, Galena was a dependent station of Nulato. It became a parish in 1952. In 1988, the old "saloon" church, having been badly damaged by the 1972 flood, was replaced by a new octagonal church and dedicated to St. John Berchmans by then Bishop Michael J. Kaniecki, S.J.

With the reduction of priests—five in the past two years—the need for Religious and lay people in the villages

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1312 PEGER ROAD FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709
Phone: 907-374-9532 <http://www.cbna.info>**

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you and your intentions by our Missionary Priests.
Please pray that God may bless us and our work.***



Sister Marilyn Marx, SNJM, and Sister Marita Soucy, CSJ, pose next to a picture of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha and a statue of Mary and Baby Jesus, dressed in Native garb, at a special Mass of Blessing on August 31, 2003.

has increased. Often a parish priest “covers” several villages. In his absence lay parish administrators, Brothers and Sisters, take on the training and day-to-day responsibilities of the parish.

Still, with all the challenges of “bush” living and the absence of an “on site” priest, Sisters Marilyn and Marita Soucy, CSJ, are excited about the mission they are immersed in, saying it is an adventure that they have both dreamed of for many years.

The Kateri Tekakwitha Center is the first of its kind along the upper Yukon River. It will benefit the villages of Galena, Huslia, Kaltag, Koyukuk, McGrath, Nulato, Ruby, and Tanana. The Sisters operate out of a building previously donated to the Diocese of Juneau. After its purchase by the Diocese of Fairbanks, and thanks to many volunteers, the

house has been remodeled and now boasts adequate living space for the two Sisters, a large training room, and an office and guest space.

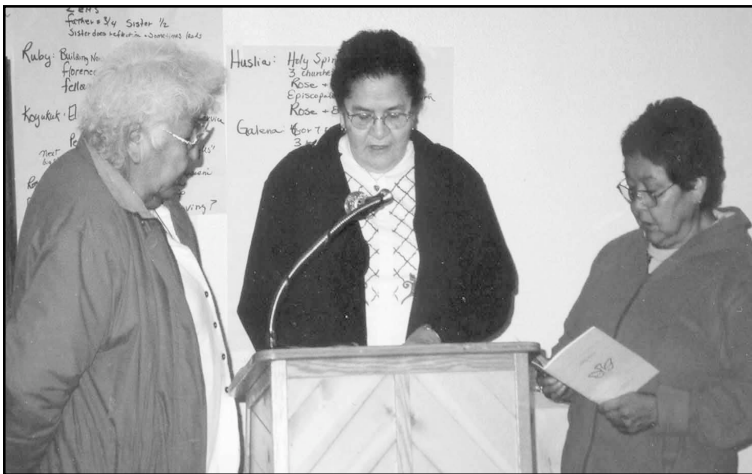
The Sisters say it is important to note that the new ministry is less a matter of their being sent, than of their being allowed to go, particularly at the ages of 69 and 72. Sister Marilyn adds, “We’re in relatively good health, thanks be to God, and we feel kind of proud that we’re going to do this at our age.”

The two Sisters are greatly missed at the Chancery offices. Often, one would listen in on their lively bantering and quick-witted conversations. The banter usually ended in a good natured “eye roll” from Sister Marilyn and an explosion of giggles from Sister Marita.



Bishop Donald Kettler blesses the four corners of the Kateri Tekakwitha Center during a special Native American Prayer of the Directions.

Sister Marilyn entered the Sisters of the Holy Names at the age of 19, in Schenectady New York, and will celebrate her Jubilee, 50 years, in 2005. The former diocesan Chancellor recalls the moment she was asked to be Chancellor of the Diocese of Fairbanks. In 1991, she arrived ready to work in the bush, as was her dream. Instead, she was needed in the Finance Office and worked there for just a year as Administrative Assistant. “One Friday evening in May, as I was leaving work, Bishop Kaniecki asked if he could talk with me. I remember it clearly, because he joked, ‘Sister, I have something to ask you that is going to ruin your whole weekend.’ I understood immediately when he asked me to be the Chancellor.” Sister’s weekend was not ruined though the decision did distract her. That Monday she accepted. Referring to Sister Marilyn, Father Louis L. Renner, S.J., wrote: “At the time of Bishop Kaniecki’s sudden death, on August 6, 2000, she, as Chancellor of the diocese, showed herself to be an exceptionally competent administrator and a very warmhearted, reassuring presence.”



Petitions are read by Galena Elders, Josephine Mountain, Dorothy Sommer, and Dee Stickman.

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.

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

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

NOVENA OF GRACE

Each year during the month of March, a Novena of Masses 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 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 of the Novena when Mass is offered for you. The Fathers on the missions also will remember you and your intentions in their Masses and prayers.

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

Shepherd of Mercy

O Shepherd of Mercy, I come to you...
My hopes; my spirit to renew,
With every prayer you understand-
My inner needs to hold my hand.

In my daily struggles to survive,
Your presence make my spirits thrive;
For all the mercy you have shown-
I know I'll never walk alone.

You've been the beacon each darkened night...
The shining hope at dawn's early light;
Ever so near each blessed day-
Never further than a prayer away.

No life is ever free from strife...
From worries, cares or surgeons knife;
But yet I find peace and serenity,
Because you're watching over me.

The wondrous feeling in knowing you're there,
Lessen the burdens I must bear.
How grateful am I, to treasure much-
Your tender, loving, radiant touch.

Again your child comes to knock-
A faithful servant from your flock.
The one who guides souls through eternity,
Is the Shepherd who watches over me.

--Ezio M. Tozzi



Alaskan Shepherd Credit Card Offerings!

The Alaskan Shepherd is happy to announce that we can now offer our donors the option of making their offerings to the Alaskan Missions by credit card. We have had substantial interest in this option and are pleased we are now able to provide this service. If you are interested in a one-time, regular or periodic offering by credit card, please fill out the information below and we will be happy to extend this service to you.

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EXPIRATION DATE: _____ **AMOUNT OF GIFT:** _____

Do you want this gift regularly charged to your account? If so, please tell us how often:

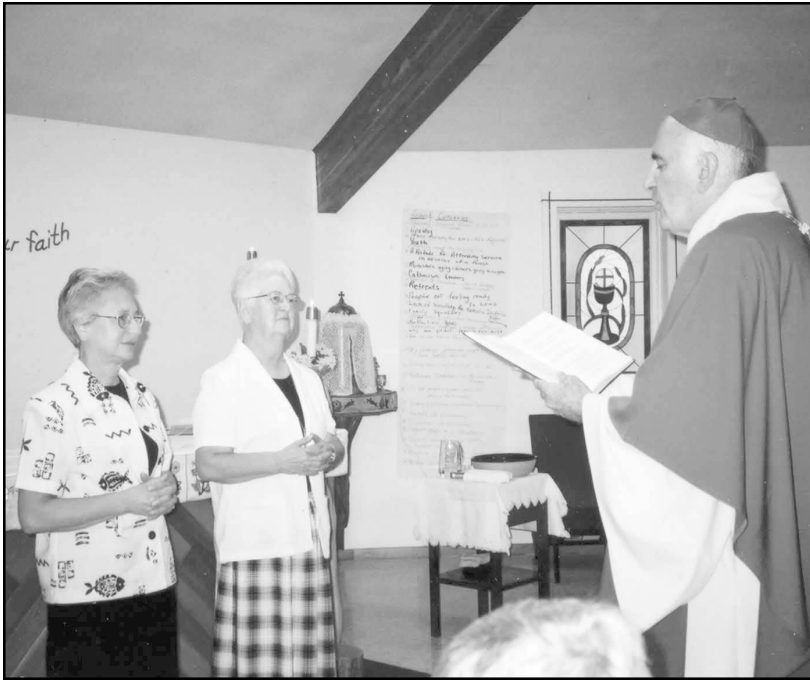
One time only: _____ Monthly: _____ Semi-Annually: _____ Annually: _____

All information will be held in the strictest confidentiality and will not be used for any other purpose than listed herein.

SIGNATURE: _____

If you would prefer to make this donation by phone, please call the Alaskan Shepherd office at 907-374-9532.

Please make checks payable to: *Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska*



Bishop Donald Kettler prays a special blessing over Sisters Marilyn and Marita at the Dedication Mass, August 31, 2003.

Sister Marita celebrated her Golden Jubilee in 1999. Prior to her new mission, she served as Director of Stephen Ministry. The ministry serves the sick, dying, bereaved, and imprisoned. She has worked for the diocese since 1986.

Though the two sisters share a keen wit and gift of service, the similarities end there. Deacon Paul, diocesan engineer, said the sister's diversity is also their strength. *"Sisters Marilyn and Marita have allowed their diversities to develop in wonderful harmony with each other, so that the fullness of ministry that the two of them together bring, because of their unique perspectives, is a wonderful gift to the people of Galena and the villages they will serve."*

We arrived at St. John Berchmans in time for a Prayer Service planned and organized by the good people of the parish. Following the service, the parishioners gathered for a meeting to discuss and identify the needs of the parishes along the Yukon, many of which were often without a priest. Young and old congregated, addressed many issues, and mapped out committees and built plans for tackling the most important and immediate issues. The training, teaching, and protection of the village youth remained highest on the list. Many of the elders expressed disgust for television, saying that it took time away from learning about Athabaskan culture and time with family. Humorously, one Native Elder remarked, *"We didn't have TV or video games when I was a child—what could we do but pray and go to church?"* Many expressed concerns about responsibility of parish and the responsibility of taking care of

an elderly spouse or parent at home. The concerns were real and each was noted carefully and with great respect. At the end of the meeting, each elder was given an opportunity to comment on the meeting and on any matter important to them. One elder sobbed that she was so happy to come to the meeting because no one ever visited her. Loneliness in Alaskan villages is very real and often forgotten.

After the meeting, the Sisters transported us to the Kateri Tekakwitha Center and gave us the grand tour! We climbed into our beds that evening in excited anticipation of the next day's activities.

Unfortunately, weather had prevented Deacon Paul from returning for the celebration. Though Galena itself was bright and sunny, low clouds hung over Fairbanks and around the river villages. Bishop Donald Kettler arrived the evening before and was a guest of Brother Justin Huber, OFM, at St. John Berchmans' rectory—which is attached to the church. Bishop Kettler concelebrated a beautiful Mass of blessing with Fr. Joe Hemmer, OFM. During the Mass, Bishop Kettler asked the two Sisters to come forward and receive a blessing as they embarked on their new mission, the implementation of the Kateri Tekakwitha Center. As he blessed them, he asked God to especially watch over the Sisters—*"to be their comfort and their strength."* Prayers were again showered on the Sisters and the Center during the prayers of the faithful. Sentiments of thanksgiving and protection were offered and Bishop Kettler invoked, *"Lord, what we have asked in faith—please now answer without fail."* Since Bishop Kettler's ordination over a year ago, he often adds this endearing request to prayers offered. It is a moving and comforting prayer to hear, day after day. The simple faith of our Alaskan Shepherd, expecting that our prayers will be answered when asked in faith.



Sister Marilyn Marx, SNJM, goes over the Ceremony of Dedication with Bishop Donald Kettler at the new Kateri Tekakwitha Center.



Bishop Donald Kettler blesses the Center's dining room while he prays, "We ask you to bless this food that we share this afternoon and welcome all guests as we would welcome Christ."

Following the Mass, we quickly returned to the Kateri Tekakwitha Center, eager to prepare for the guests that would fill the house for the Bishop's special blessing. While we tried to create room, over one hundred parishioners gathered, bringing potlatch dishes to share. As the space tightened, voices and laughter too increased. Soon, Bishop Kettler announced the ceremony would begin with a special Native American Prayer of the Directions and a petition to ask Blessed Kateri to be our guide and protector. The bishop first asked all to turn to the North. Adults, children, Religious and lay turned to the North while Bishop Kettler sprinkled holy water and prayed, "North is a place of trust, a trusting place. North is waiting and watching. Give us strength and courage to embrace our crosses and be transformed. Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, Pray For Us." We were then invited to turn to the East while Bishop Kettler prayed, "East is the place of the rising sun. East is for beginning, birth and newness of life. Recreate us anew each day and grant us the dawn of understanding. Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, Pray For Us." To the South we prayed, "South is the place of daytime growth, of warmth and friendship. South is for activity, childhood, searching for answers. Bless us with true and faithful family and friends and deepen our fidelity to one another. Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, Pray For Us." Finally to the West we prayed, "West is the place of the setting sun. West is for pondering, looking within, going deep inside, the place of mystical rest. Dwell in the holy temple of our hearts, heal our hurts, and help us to rest in peace. Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, Pray For Us." Bishop Don concluded with, "After much work and prayer by so many members of our diocese, we gather now to bless and dedicate this new Kateri Tekakwitha Center. It will be a center for our eight villages and a place where we may come to know one another and give witness to our faith in Christ. Here youth and adults will

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continue to learn of their Catholic faith and participate in parish ministry opportunities, which will deepen their commitment to live as Christ has taught us. We pray that the Word of God may always echo from its walls." Similar blessings followed in the kitchen, dining room, living room, entrance, bedrooms, and laundry room. Now many made their way to the conference room and kitchen to begin the potlatch line and settle into a seat. Yet seats were in short supply. Though many offered their own seats to Bishop Kettler, he kindly refused all and with paper plate in hand, found a spot on the floor amid elders and teens. After a delicious meal of many Native treats, all helped to clear and clean. Bishop Kettler once again expressed his thanks for the Sisters' dedication and hospitality and left to catch a plane back to Fairbanks.

Later that day, we set out to locate the perfect spot to plant a tree! Deacon Paul had kindly agreed to transport a beautiful young Spruce, purchased by Madeline Nance, to Galena, as part of the dedication ceremony. We found the perfect spot and took turns shoveling, packing dirt, and finally planting the tree—a tree we hoped would grow as quickly as the Kateri Tekakwitha Center.

Sisters Marilyn and Marita, have already planned many training programs for the Catholic parishes on the Yukon, including a Retreat for Prayer Leaders and Eucharistic Ministers, Training of Lay People to do the required baptism and marriage preparation, Stephen Ministry Outreach, Adult Scripture Study, and Confirmation Preparation Training.

Many occasions in life involve the challenge and excitement of *beginning* something. Theodore Roethke wrote, "We learn by going where we have to go." The Kateri Tekakwitha Center and indeed the two Sisters located there, epitomize this reflection. In the spirit of early and modern Missionaries in Alaska, Sisters Marilyn and Marita expect to do a lot of listening. The Center will become what the Catholic Native People of Galena and neighboring villages need it to be. Everyone will teach and everyone will be taught.

--Patty Walter



Galena parishioners Diana Weber and Agnes Sweetsir join Nulato's Parish Administrator and Coordinator of the Upper Yukon Region, Brother Bob Ruzicka, OFM, in the Kateri Tekakwitha Center kitchen, shortly before the potlatch celebration begins.

Again we assure you that we never, under any circumstances, sell, exchange, or give out the names of our benefactors. This has been and continues to be our sacred pledge.