



**CATHOLIC  
HOME  
MISSIONS**

## Diocese of Juneau—Vocations



Memorial Day Mass celebrated outdoors at the National Shrine of St. Thérèse in Juneau, AK.

By Beth Griffin

*Note: Shortly after the completion of this article, the Holy See announced that Pope Francis had merged the Archdiocese of Anchorage and the Diocese of Juneau to create a new ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau. At the same time, he appointed Juneau's Bishop Andrew E. Bellisario, CM as archbishop of the newly configured metropolitan archdiocese. Archbishop Bellisario had been serving as the bishop of Juneau and apostolic administrator of Anchorage. References to Diocese of Juneau staff were accurate at the time of publication.*

**E**ight priests and four permanent deacons serve the entire Diocese of Juneau. Really—just 12 men. They cover 19 parishes and missions separated by vast expanses of water and wilderness in southeastern Alaska. The Diocese of Juneau's 37,000 square miles are accessible primarily by boat and plane.

The diocese has only 7,000 Catholics, a number more consistent with a large parish population in the lower 48 states—not with the population of an entire diocese. Because of the spread-out nature of its communities and resources, the Diocese of Juneau receives significant grant support from Catholic Home Missions (CHM).

Fr. Michael Galbraith, director of vocations and seminarians for the diocese, says promoting vocations and recruiting seminarians and priests requires persistence and creativity. “Most of our priests are second-career vocations and all come from other areas,” he says.

Fr. Michael himself flew for the United States Air Force and retired from the pharmaceutical industry in Fort Worth, Texas, before pursuing his priestly vocation. He visited Juneau with a seminary classmate and ultimately asked to be ordained for the diocese. After he finished seminary, Bishop Edward J. Burns, then of Juneau, asked him to serve a pastoral year to make sure he and the diocese were a good fit. Fr. Michael was ordained for the diocese in 2015.

He says priests and potential seminarians are drawn to the area for the same reasons laypeople find it welcoming. “It’s not what you might think of as Alaska. It’s more like a cooler Seattle. The climate is perfect if you don’t mind a little rain!” he says. “The beauty of the area is breathtaking. It’s a challenge—in a great way—and you can go out hiking, fishing, and hunting and not be stuck indoors.”

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# Neighbors

ISSUE 2 2020

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

# FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Alaska is often called the Last Frontier, not only because it was one of the last states to become part of the United States, but also because of its small population, its large land area, and the rugged lifestyle that many of its residents lead. Many Alaskans work in the oil and gas industry, commercial fishing, tourism, construction, and healthcare. However, many of these jobs are seasonal or part-time. This is especially true in

areas that are usually accessed only by boat or aircraft.

In this issue of *Neighbors* we give witness to the Alaskan pioneer spirit, across the 37,000 square miles of territory in southeastern Alaska formerly known as the Diocese of Juneau.\* The men called to priestly ministry here serve a relatively small Catholic population spread across 19 parishes and missions. They often answer their vocation after first pursuing other careers in the military or the local industries, bringing with them leadership skills and experiences that have prepared them for the unique responsibilities that pastors need to minister effectively to the people of the region. In this issue, it is also my pleasure to share with you the story of one seminarian who is pursuing his priestly vocation in this unique environment with funding from Catholic Home Missions Appeal.

You will also find an interview with Catholic Home Missions director Kevin Day, who explains the many ways in which your contributions to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal provide invaluable support to the dioceses it serves. Your assistance yields tangible results, supporting critical marriage and family life ministries, child and youth protection efforts, lay staff support and training, and the formation of seminarians and clergy in places such as southeastern Alaska.

The gratitude that our home mission dioceses express to us is a sign of the real impact that your support of Catholic Home Missions has on the lives of our neighbors across the country. By sharing this good news with you, I join in this gratitude to you for your prayerful generosity and support.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend W. Shawn McKnight  
Bishop of Jefferson City  
Chairman, USCCB Subcommittee  
on Catholic Home Missions

\*On May 19, 2020, the Holy See announced that Pope Francis had merged the Archdiocese of Anchorage and the Diocese of Juneau to create the new Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau.

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The sparse staffing in the diocese also means a new priest is likely to become a pastor soon after ordination. “We don’t have the luxury of a long apprenticeship,” he says. “Because of the early opportunities for leadership and the remoteness of our parishes, we look for someone who’s mature, self-confident, maybe a bit older, and comfortable being on his own.”



Seminarian Luke Daniel

These requirements may explain why most priests of the diocese have previous professional work experience in Alaska or a background in the military. One of the two current seminarians was previously posted in the Juneau area with the Coast Guard, and the other worked there in the fishing industry.

Of the eight active clergy, four are priests of the Diocese of Juneau and are 67 years or older. Four belong to religious orders, including two from the Korean Society of Missionaries. Six are military veterans.

Juneau’s bishop, Andrew E. Bellisario, has said the shortage of priests in the Juneau area is “critical.” In response, he and Fr. Michael have recruited candidates from other dioceses, and Bishop Bellisario has reached out to fellow members of his Vincentian congregation to consider service in Juneau.

Deacon Michael Monagle, the vice-chancellor of the Juneau diocese, says one obstacle to recruiting is the lack of Catholic formation. “We have only one Catholic school, and it ends at fourth grade. We have no Catholic high schools or colleges in the diocese. Alaska and the Pacific Northwest are notoriously unchurched, with only 15% of the population self-identifying as Catholic, so finding Catholic men with a vocational call within the diocese poses a real challenge,” he says.

Finances are a significant barrier to entry for men with a vocation, Deacon Michael says. “The expense of seminary education is considerable, running approximately \$35,000 each year.”

As a practical result, the diocese only recruits college graduates. “We don’t have money to send men to college [first], and some understand that, but it’s the biggest drawback,” Fr. Michael says.

“We distribute posters and brochures throughout the diocese and use talks at the end of Mass two or three times a year to encourage people to consider vocations. At my parish and some others, we pray for vocations at

the end of every Mass,” Fr. Michael says. “We also work with parish youth groups to promote vocations to the priesthood or religious life.”

The diocese has no active religious sisters, but two women from the diocese are in formation to join religious

congregations, Fr. Michael says. One will stay with her cloistered order in California, but the other might be assigned to Juneau with another sister after her profession of religious vows.

The Diocese of Juneau uses CHM funds for various critical ministries,

but it relies on CHM for almost half of its vocation and seminary budget. Bishop Bellisario says, “Without the generosity of CHM, we simply would not be able to pay for our own seminarians’ formation.”

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

“Without our funding, many mission dioceses would have to limit or abandon critical pastoral ministries,” says Kevin Day, director of Catholic Home Missions (CHM). “What we do makes a difference. It has a direct impact. Although parishioners in mission dioceses are as generous as they can be, their numbers are few, and their areas are large. This results in many needing assistance with basic pastoral care and infrastructure expenses,” he says.

“In some cases, our grant keeps the lights on in the chancery and allows the bishop to travel and minister to his flock in person. This is especially true for eparchies of the Eastern Catholic Rites, where a bishop’s territory may cover the entire United States,” Kevin says.

In addition to funding dioceses’ basic infrastructure needs, he says CHM grants help fund staff development opportunities in mission dioceses in critical areas such as child and youth protection, as well as marriage and family ministries. “People are thirsting for these types of programs, and we enable dioceses be responsive,” he says.

“Because of my work, I have been blessed to see the gratitude of those dioceses that receive funding. I am often told by bishops that CHM support in their dioceses is helping them provide good liturgy and authentic Catholic teaching not only now but into the future. As a parishioner and donor, I know we all receive many requests for assistance, but I hope people will continue to respond to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal as an opportunity to give and to become co-workers in the vineyard here at home.”

**"I am often told by bishops that CHM support in their dioceses is helping them provide good liturgy and authentic Catholic teaching not only now but into the future."**

## FROM SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA TO JUNEAU . . . VIA OREGON AND ILLINOIS

It took time, but James Wallace discovered a vocation that has deep roots. His parents met at a Catholic young adult group in San Diego, California. James graduated from Catholic elementary and high schools in southern California before joining the United States Coast Guard. Near the end of his eight years of service, James was assigned to Sitka, Alaska, as a flight medic. The pastor of St. Gregory Nazianzen parish, where James worshipped in Sitka, was a kindred soul whose presence and example were inspirational.

Although his sympathetic pastor suggested James might have a vocation to the priesthood, James recalls, “I wasn’t ready to fully engage it.”

As he discerned his vocation, however, James was drawn back to Juneau, where the bishop invited him to become a

seminarian. He has now studied at Mt. Angel Seminary in Oregon and Mundelein Seminary in Illinois.

At age 34, James plans to be ordained by Archbishop Bellisario in June 2020 at St. Paul the Apostle in Juneau. James looks forward to the priesthood as an opportunity to “be of service when called with joy.”

“To serve at the altar for Christ is the greatest gift that’s ever been given,” James says. And to do it in Alaska is wonderful. “My love for God was life-changing, life-saving, and soul-saving there,” he concludes.



**Deacon James Wallace processes out of his diaconal ordination Mass in Sitka, AK.**



*Strengthening the Church at Home*

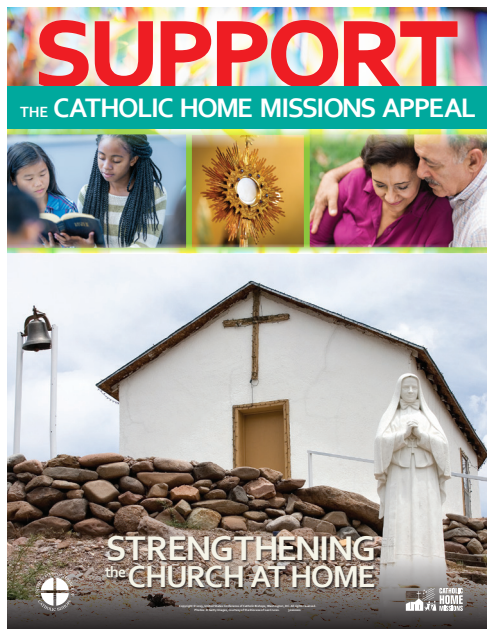
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READ ABOUT HOW the Diocese of Juneau fosters priestly vocations in an exciting and challenging location with support from Catholic Home Missions.



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