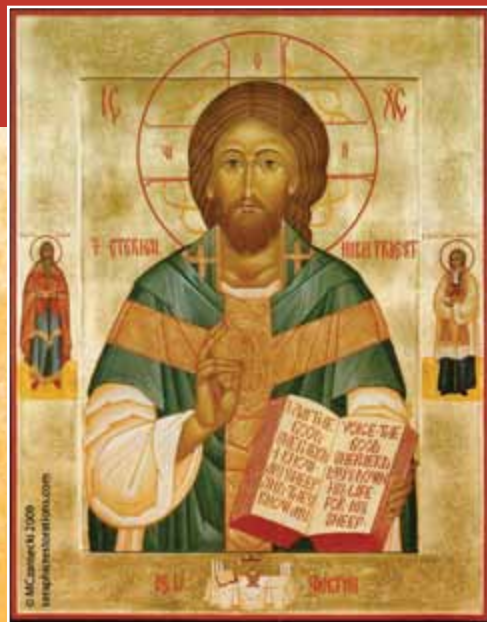


Strengthening the Church Through a Strong and Holy Presbyterate

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE OF JUNEAU



Pastoral Letter to the Faithful of the Diocese of Juneau
From the Presbyterate of the Diocese of Juneau, Alaska

Strengthening the Church
through a Strong and Holy Presbyterate

I. Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters of the church of the Diocese of Juneau, it is with great joy and pleasure that I present to you this pastoral letter. This pastoral letter is unique in that it not only comes from me, your bishop, but it is a pastoral letter to you from all the priests active in the Diocese of Juneau, our local church. Together we make up the presbyterate of the church in Southeast Alaska.

While most pastoral letters are written by individual bishops to the people of their dioceses, this letter is somewhat different, it is presented by the whole presbyterate of the Diocese of Juneau. *I thought it would be best to write this pastoral letter with my brother priests so that through a strong, holy, dedicated presbyterate we can work together to strengthen the church.* My brother priests and I recognize that this task of strengthening the church will not happen alone. We pledge to work with you, utilizing the gifts and wisdom of the Holy Spirit in order to focus on the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ through the traditions of our church.

I invited our priests to join me in writing this pastoral letter as a fitting way to conclude the Year for Priests. Our recent annual priests' retreat was used to work on this pastoral letter. In doing so, I worked with the nine active priests of this diocese as we formulated an outline, discussed its contents, and prayed for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in bringing forth this message. This retreat took place at the Shrine of St. Thérèse here in the Diocese of Juneau. Through the intercession of St. Thérèse, the patron saint of Alaska, and St. John Vianney, the patron saint of all priests, we alternated times in discussion with time before the Blessed Sacrament. This pastoral letter has provided us the opportunity to solidify our fraternal bond with each other and to express to you, the faithful of this wonderful diocese, our priestly commitment.

The priests of this diocese are my closest collaborators in sharing my ministry as bishop of this local church, in particular, by fulfilling together the responsibilities of teaching, governing, and sanctifying. In light of this, each of us had the responsibility of drafting a section of this pastoral letter and we all participated in the editing process. It is our hope that this endeavor will help strengthen the church in Southeast Alaska. Along with this pastoral letter, and through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of priests, we offer to you our prayers.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Bishop Edward J. Burns

Presented: June 6, 2010
Feast of Corpus Christi
St. Catherine of Siena Parish
Petersburg, Alaska

What is the “Presbyterate”?

Our English word “priest” is derived from the Greek word *presbyteros* and the corresponding Latin word *presbyterus*. Their original meaning was that of “elder,” but in the Catholic church they now refer specifically to ordained priests. Though most Catholics are used to dealing with priests as individual ministers, usually in a parish environment, the Second Vatican Council taught that priests are not isolated individuals; they have special relationships among themselves, with their bishop, and with the people they serve. In fact, all the priests of a local church, usually a diocese, together with their bishop form a single presbyterate by which they enjoy a special communion among themselves in union with the universal church. The presbyterate of a diocese includes all the active priests who are *incardinated*—permanently serving under the authority of that diocese. It also includes the priests of other dioceses and of religious communities with stable assignments in that diocese. The presbyterate of the Diocese of Juneau currently consists of Bishop Edward Burns together with seven incardinated priests and two priests of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a large religious community.

The members of our presbyterate have a special relationship, as individual priests and as a presbyterate, with the people of the Diocese of Juneau. The priests incardinated in our diocese are primarily ordained for the service of its people under the authority of its bishop. The same is true of those priests who belong to religious communities, while they are assigned to our diocese. Service to the people of Southeast Alaska as their spiritual fathers and shepherds is the heart of our ministry both as individual priests and as a united presbyterate.

The presbyterates of most dioceses include dozens, and even hundreds, of priests. Here in the Diocese of Juneau we know one another very well as friends and brothers. We often gather as a presbyterate around the Bishop’s dining room table. Although we are scattered among the communities of Southeast Alaska, we gather by telephone with the bishop each Monday morning for a short sharing of news and experience and to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. We hope and pray that this letter promotes an even greater communion among ourselves, the priests and Bishop. We also pray that it will fortify our relationship with you, the people of the Diocese of Juneau, whom we are called by Christ to serve.

Celebrating the Year for Priests with a Pastoral Letter

On June 19, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI inaugurated a Year for Priests. This year began on the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, a day traditionally devoted to prayer for the sanctification of the clergy.¹



He chose this year as the church celebrated the 150th anniversary of the death of St. John Mary Vianney, the patron of all priests. In providing his fellow priests with such an example, the Holy Father was mindful of the words of his predecessor, Pope Paul VI, who observed that, “modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”ⁱⁱ

The Splendor of Southeast Alaska

*“The heavens declare the glory of God;
the sky proclaims its builder’s craft.
One day to the next conveys that message;
one night to the next imparts that knowledge.
There is no word or sound; no voice is heard;
Yet their report goes forth through all the earth,
their message, to the ends of the world.” (Ps 19:2-5)*

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Ps 19:2

The glory of God in creation is all around us as we live, work and engage in recreation here in Southeast Alaska. That may be why so many of us who came for a visit or a secular job decided to stay. Creation, God’s primordial gospel of good news is not just whispering here; it is shouting about God’s magnificent love and care for us. The changing of the light throughout the day shows off how glorious God is in the beauty of the place that makes up our diocese. Who of us has not been caught up in the wonder of God as we look at a glacier descending from the snow covered peaks of the ice field? Or marveled at the beauty of the thousands of forested islands, or watched in awe as humpback whales bubble net feed on the abundant summer food of the Inside Passage waters? Or delighted by a rainbow when the sun shines in spite of the rain, or been caught up in the beauty and variety of the flowers blooming in the spring? Or lost one’s self looking up at night sky as the northern lights dance across the heavens? The glories of God’s creation, so beautifully arranged here in Southeast Alaska, bespeak the power and wisdom of their creator. We are so blessed to live here.

“In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth. . . . God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. . . . God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good.” (Gn 1:1, 27, 31a)

These simple verses from Genesis illustrate one of the foundational beliefs of Christianity. The beginning of wisdom is to acknowledge that God is at work in each of our lives, and to understand that everything was created by God out of love and each of us have a purpose. Catholic social teaching tells us that as coworkers with God, in caring for and sustaining the world, we have a responsibility to protect the dignity of the human person as well as the planet. With God’s grace, we participate in advancing God’s kingdom on earth.

History of the Diocese of Juneau

Under the authority of Archbishop Charles J. Seghers of Vancouver Island, Canada, Father John Althoff and Father William Heynen established parishes in Wrangell, Juneau, and Sitka between 1879 and 1885, a period that coincided with a great expansion of gold mining activity. The example of these three remarkable priests continues to inspire us today. Archbishop Seghers was originally from Belgium, and personally ensured that the Catholic faith would be planted firmly in Alaska. In addition to working with Fathers Althoff and Heynen in Southeast Alaska, Archbishop Seghers visited the regions farther north at great personal risk. On his fifth missionary journey to Alaska, Archbishop Seghers was murdered in November 1886 by an unstable traveling companion on the banks of the Yukon River. He was only 47 years old when he gave his life for the Catholic faith, and yet his work lives on today in the three Catholic dioceses of Alaska.

Father Althoff, originally from Holland, spent sixteen years planting the Catholic faith in Southeast Alaska. In 1879 he established the first Catholic parish in Alaska, Saint Rose of Lima Parish in Wrangell; and in 1885 he established Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish (now our diocesan cathedral parish) in Juneau. Indeed, Father Althoff personally helped build the first parish church in Juneau, and his handiwork is reputed to be incorporated in our existing cathedral. Father Althoff also brought the Sisters of Saint Ann from Victoria, British Columbia, to staff a Catholic hospital and school in Juneau. Father Althoff's efforts were complemented by those of Father William Heynen, another Dutchman, who in 1885 established the Catholic community in Sitka that became Saint Gregory Nazianzen Parish. Father Heynen celebrated the first Mass in Sitka in an old saloon, which was typical of the conditions under which he and Father Althoff ministered. While they both eventually returned to Canada, Fathers Althoff and Heynen are rightly considered the pioneers of the Catholic church in Southeast Alaska, and their example continues to inspire us who follow in their footsteps.

Beginning in 1894, Alaska became an independent mission territory under the leadership of priests of the Society of Jesus. In 1917, Jesuit Bishop Joseph R. Crimont became the first Vicar Apostolic of (the Territory) Alaska, serving until his death in 1945 with his headquarters in Juneau. Bishop Crimont was legendary for his travels throughout Alaska, often in very remote northern areas by dogsled. Even today, older members of the Alaska Catholic community remember Bishop Crimont's faithful service and able leadership.

On June 23, 1951, Pope Pius XII established the Diocese of Juneau, the territory of which included Southeast Alaska and also the south central region containing Anchorage, Kodiak, the Kenai Peninsula, the Matanuska Valley, and Prince William Sound. Father Dermot O'Flanagan



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of Anchorage was ordained and installed as the first bishop of the new diocese. During the years leading to statehood in 1959, the center of population of Alaska shifted decisively to the north and west around Anchorage, even though Juneau remained the capital city of the new state. As a result, on February 9, 1966, the portion of the Juneau diocese lying outside Southeast Alaska was detached to form part of the new Archdiocese of Anchorage, and our diocese took the form that it has today.

Priests: In the Person of Christ

As priests we are called to continue the work of those who have gone before us and to mediate the presence of Christ in the world today. We are set apart by ordination to serve the people of God in collaboration with our local bishop. The church teaches that when a priest follows Jesus' command to "do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19), he is acting in the person of Christ himself, "*in persona Christi*." We do not act on our own behalf, as if the Eucharist were a private act of devotion between the priest and Christ. No, we bring with us to the altar all the people whom we serve. Just as Jesus did on the cross, even today the priest takes the people of God, with all their sadness and pain and all of their joy and gladness, to the Father so that he can transform each of us by his grace and mercy. In this sense, the priest is acting in the person of Christ, mediator between God and the human family.

Jesus is our one Mediator before the Father, for the salvation of all people. "Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25). Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was "once for all" (Heb 10:10). Jesus' blood does not just atone for the sins of the past but for all sins committed for all time.

Every priest is called to be a reflection of Christ's saving mystery. When Jesus said "Do this in memory of me," he set his apostles apart as priests in his image. He established a new order of priests who would be ministers of his new covenant. From that point on, the church holds that through the sacrament of holy orders priests receive a special anointing to continue Jesus' priesthood on earth. They continue to represent Jesus to the world, speaking his words, and exercising his ministry of reconciliation in our midst by offering their own lives as well.

It is not a personal decision but rather a divine commission, a calling from God. This calling to witness Christ to the world is the reason why we have been ordained. It is also at the root of why we are enabled to assume the authority of Jesus, acting in the person of Christ in the world.

The Joy of the Priesthood

“The Church needs joyful priests, capable of bringing true joy to God’s people, which is the good news in all its truth and transforming power.” (Pope John Paul II, Address at Vespers at St. Joseph’s Seminary, New York, 6 October 1995)

Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit and a powerful sign of God’s presence. One could reasonably expect to find a tangible spirit of joy in those called to represent Christ serving the people of God as priests. In his recent book, *The Joy of the Priesthood*, Msgr. Steven Rossetti makes a powerful case that recent studies show that this is the case. Priests are indeed joy filled people with over 90 percent in two different studies reporting high satisfaction with their call and ministry. The priesthood challenges every one of us to grow and change to meet the needs of the people we serve. Our time is not our own, we meet each situation with a flexibility to adapt to what God presents each day and hour. Celebrating the sacraments gives us the opportunity to enter deeply into people’s lives with the light of Christ and the love of God. These moments bring us great joy as we witness God working through us to bring new life and to build up the people of God.

The Service of Priests as Spiritual Fathers and Shepherds

The Second Vatican Council and Pope John Paul II have taught that, through the sacrament of holy orders, every priest is “configured” to Christ as Head and Shepherd of the church. Through that configuration to Christ, a priest is called and empowered in distinct ways to lead and guide the members of the church entrusted to him under the authority of the bishop and in communion with the other members of his presbyterate. Through that same configuration to Christ, he is called and empowered to exercise this outward authority with the interior attitude of Christ himself: to do so in a spirit of total, sacrificial self-giving as a servant of Christ’s people.

This Christ-like approach of priests as spiritual fathers and shepherds is in stark contrast with the ways that our people often experience leadership in other areas of their lives. All too often, such leadership reflects in some way an assertion of power by the leaders in ways that highlight their dominance over other members of the community. It is precisely because of the tremendous power and authority that he is called to exercise on behalf of Christ that the approach of a priest to his ministry must reject such attitudes of dominance. Like Jesus himself, we are called to embrace a sacrificial servanthood based on the fact that the “...Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mt 20:28)

This spirit of service following the example of Christ leads us to understand our priestly ministry as that of spiritual fathers and

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shepherds. Jesus repeatedly spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd. The configuration of a priest to Christ the Good Shepherd demands that he strive to conform to this image. Indeed, we, like Christ, are called to lay down our lives through prayer, penance, and sacrifice for the sake of those entrusted to our pastoral care. Priests are also called to spiritual fatherhood. Like the good father of a family, we are called to make decisions and take actions that affect others in very significant ways; a good father always puts his family first, and his own interests last. A good priest, like a good father, is always ready, if necessary, to suffer and sacrifice on behalf of his people.

II. *Challenges of Priesthood Today*

Scandals in the Church and Their Effects

It seems that every age has its delights and its challenges; and this age is no exception. We rejoice in the vibrant faith so obvious in our Catholic parishes and missions. We are proud of the leaders of our church who speak out in the public forum on the issues of Catholic social teaching. At the same time, we are plagued with the continuing reports of scandalous behavior by a few of those who are supposed to be our leaders and mentors. With you, we, your bishop and priests, experience a deep sense of disillusionment, confusion, mistrust, betrayal, embarrassment, and hurt. With you we are the church and with you we experience the anguish and pain. This dark cloud of scandal can be a stumbling block to faith and trust. In addressing the problem, we pledge to foster healing, restore confidence, and become a more effective instrument of God's grace and salvation in our age.

Thus, we cannot attribute blame for our current travails solely or even primarily to those outside the church. As our Holy Father frankly stated, ". . . today we see it in a really terrifying way: the greatest persecution of the Church does not come from enemies on the outside, but is born from the sin within the church ..." (Pope Benedict XVI in-flight press conference on 11 May 2010, en route to Portugal; *Origins* 40, 3, [27 May 2010], 35).

Evil and Its Grip

"Stay sober and alert. Your opponent the devil is prowling like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, solid in your faith." (1 Pt 5:8-9)

The reign of God has been under attack from the beginning, as St. Paul proclaimed to the church at Thessalonica in the first century. Though "the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil," (I Jn 3:8) the

Evil One has been given his time. Is it any wonder that he does his worst to ensnare those who shepherd God's holy people – bishops and priests who, though sacred ordination, are configured to Christ, while yet remaining “vessels of clay” in their frail humanity? “Strike the shepherd that the sheep may be dispersed, and I will turn my hand against the little ones” (Zec 13:7) – such is the tactic of the devil, from Judas' betrayal of our Lord to the most recent incidents of crimes by priests or defections from the ministry.

Boat on Stormy Seas

“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” (Mk 4:41)

Jesus had made this small band of fisherman feel very special when he asked them to take him across the lake, away from the large crowd. They probably were looking forward to having “quality” time with Jesus, and likely feeling rather proud to be included among those few intimates with whom Jesus would be spending his evening. Suddenly, their lives were in danger from one of the violent storms that often come out of nowhere on the Sea of Galilee. The Apostles were amazed that Jesus simply continued to sleep, even as the boat was being tossed about by fierce winds and taking on water at an alarming rate. They cried out to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mk 4:38)

We are not exempt from storms. While we understand nature's storms in the form of tornados, hurricanes, etc.; we also experience storms because we are a people living with the effects of original sin. We face the storms of life in the form of sickness, accidents, disappointments, relocations, divorce, loneliness, and death. We face wars, scandals of sexual abuse, divorces or priests who leave the priesthood... etc.

Whether our “storms” are very public ones that everyone witnesses or private agonies known only to us, the terror is the same. All too often Jesus seems to be absent when we need him most. Sometimes the night can be so dark that we cannot even see what is in front of us. We long for a flash of lightning, just to catch a brief glimpse of Jesus there in our boat.

Let us keep our focus on the Lord. Just as Peter began to falter (Mt 14:29-30) when he took his focus off Christ, we as a diocese must keep our gaze fixed intently on the Lord. In doing so, we will experience the calm, trust, peace and joy that can come only from him.

The Strength of the Presbyterate

“Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Mk 1:17)

Jesus calls his first companions and in doing so begins a close relationship with them. These words have meaning to all of us who have

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accepted Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior; however, these words have special meaning for those of us who are called to the ordained priesthood in the Catholic church. Jesus, sent by God the Father, chose some very special men to help him spread his message. History teaches us that those first twelve apostles shared the Gospel message with others and through centuries of apostolic succession, we have the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments present in the Catholic church today. The gospel message has a very special meaning; when those of us who are called to represent Jesus as “priest” begin our relationship with the Lord, we begin to realize what a tremendous gift we have been given. The training and guidance we received throughout our priestly formation has provided us with most of the useful tools we would need when that very special day of ordination arrived. With ongoing formation, we hope to continue to grow in our priestly ministry.

As priests of today, we face challenges that are similar to those faced by the men who have preceded us. However, in our time we have encountered the particular difficulties of this present age. Serving in Southeast Alaska presents certain challenges which are unique to our part of the country. That being said, we are fortunate to share our common brotherhood as priests. In this brotherhood we also gain the strength that helps us to hold fast to that close relationship with the one Lord, Jesus Christ, whom we represent here on earth.

In God’s eternal plan for the salvation of us all, he has chosen us, your priests, to be your servants and leaders during these difficult times. We have faith that God equips us for the ministry of word and sacrament in this, our own time and place. Confident that God is with us, we priests pray that we always may be with God while ministering to you for your salvation and God’s greater glory.

“For if the sacred liturgy holds the first place in the life of the Church, the Eucharistic mystery stands at the heart and center of the liturgy. . . . We are cleansed and strengthened to live not for ourselves but for God, and to be united in love among ourselves. . .” (Mysterium fidei, Encyclical on the Mystery of Faith, Pope Paul VI)

The term Eucharist comes from the Greek word *eucharistia* which means “thanksgiving” and as we all know the holy Eucharistic has its origin at the Last Supper. In his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II cited “the progress made in regard to the promotion of the Holy Eucharist in the Church.” He wrote, “The Magisterium’s commitment to proclaiming the Eucharistic mystery has been matched by interior growth within the Christian community.” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, #10) The holy Eucharist is central to a priest’s life. He alone represents Jesus the High Priest at the altar, and as he does must always remember the great privilege it is to be able to celebrate with those gathered at holy Mass. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. At each celebration of the Eucharist, God

is most present through his word and body and blood to all the people of God. Let us always remember Jesus our High Priest has given us this great gift of the holy Eucharist. We must always treasure and nurture this precious gift.

Chaste Celibacy, Obedience and Simplicity of Life

The strength of the presbyterate comes from living the fullness of the vows and promises made by the priest at ordination. As the priest lives the unity and oneness with the church through obedience, the call to chaste celibacy, and a life lived simply for the Lord and for the people of God entrusted to his care, he strives to bring to fulfillment the good work God has begun in him. The celebration of the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, the frequent reception of the sacrament of penance and all the disciplines of living a good priestly life will aid the priest in living the fullness of life Christ has promised.

We are espoused to Jesus and none other, thus freeing us to have a special “love” for all people, not just a selected few. In the teaching of Vatican II, we read, “There are many ways in which celibacy is in harmony with the priesthood... By preserving virginity or celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven (Mt 19:12) priests are consecrated in a new and excellent way to Christ. They more readily cling to him with undivided heart (1 Cor 7:32-34) and dedicate themselves more freely in him and through him to the service of God and men.” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, #16)



We Recognize that There is Much to Do

As our presbyterate confronts the evils of our day, we recognize that there is much that we must do for the healing of our church and of our people, and for the growth of the Catholic faith in Southeast Alaska. First of all, we must apologize sincerely and wholeheartedly to our people for the evil they have suffered, especially to the victims of abuse by priests and to the families of those victims. We must continue efforts to ensure the protection of our children from such abuse in the future. We must individually and collectively recommit ourselves to the promises we made at our ordination, recognizing that it is only through God’s grace that we can fulfill those promises. In particular, we must renew our individual commitments to strive for personal holiness. We must recognize the need for renewed evangelization efforts, directed toward both those Catholics who have left the active practice of their faith and others who might be open to becoming Catholics through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. In order to provide for continued priestly ministry in our diocese, we must consistently encourage the men of our diocese, especially those who are younger, to consider and follow vocations to the priesthood, including priestly vocations to our own presbyterate.

III. *The Task Before Us*

Apology and Reparation

As members of the presbyterate of the Diocese of Juneau, we offer our deepest apology to those who have suffered the humiliation and degradation of sexual abuse perpetrated by any priest or other church ministers. We are sorry for the failures of our church leaders, especially its priests, to recognize and acknowledge the lasting harm caused by such abuse.

Heavenly
Father, we ask
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An apology for the sins and failings of our past is not sufficient to restore justice. We recognize our personal and collective responsibility as the presbyterate of this diocese to offer reparation to atone for the evil carried out by priests, and to remedy the harm that has been done, to the best of our ability. We recognize the social effects of all sins, and we priests have a special, God-given role in combating those effects. As a matter of reparation, we seek to repair what has been damaged by another's sins. We priests are called by God, and we freely offer, to do this. We do this in union with Jesus Christ, who offered himself totally to God the Father in reparation for the sins of the whole human family. By doing this, we priests more fully embrace our vocation of serving *in persona Christi*. In carrying out this resolution, which depends heavily on our renewed commitment to personal holiness, we can rely on the examples of many of our brother priests in the past.

In light of this, we have agreed that when the Catholic community has gathered for Masses in the Diocese of Juneau on the first Sunday of Advent, November 28, 2010, the priest will offer the following prayer:

Heavenly Father, we ask that you come to our aid and guide your Church. We have experienced devastating effects of atrocious offenses against the young and vulnerable committed by those who were to be trusted. We beg you, Father, free your Church from sin and protect it from every evil. May all those who have suffered as a result of these sins be healed by your love. Restore us to the likeness of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may be pleasing in your sight and always carry out your will. We ask this through our Lord, Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

The bishop will also pray this prayer in every parish and mission of the Diocese on his next visit following the above mentioned Sunday in Advent.

In addition to spiritual reparation, we as a presbyterate are called to implement remedies for the harm that has been done. The Diocese of Juneau will continue to ensure that victims receive the care and

resources they need for recovery. Measures have also been taken to remove permanently from ministry any of our priests who have been found through proper procedures to have committed sexual abuse of children and young people. By way of prevention, we are resolved to prevent one another from giving in to this and similar temptations through common prayer, practical advice and sharing, fraternal correction, and, if or when necessary, direct intervention. We recognize the need to be committed in keeping each other on the path to holiness.

The Protection of God's Children

Although the great majority of priests have never been involved in such misconduct and regard it with horror, we as a presbyterate are called to pray for forgiveness. In order to be effective, this expression of sorrow and contrition must be reflected in deeds, concrete measures taken to protect children and young people from such abuse in the future and to ensure that priests who have committed such abuse are permanently removed from ministry. The church, including the Diocese of Juneau, has taken such measures, although we know that there is more to be done. Our diocese has aggressively implemented the *Charter and Norms for the Protection of Children and Young People* that were adopted in 2002 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and approved by the Holy See. In our parishes, missions, schools, and outreach activities the safeguards required by the norms have been implemented, and this has been verified by independent audits conducted by impartial investigators. Our diocese has developed safeguards for ensuring that registered sex offenders can have supervised access to Mass and the sacraments in our churches while at the same time protecting our children. A Diocesan Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People was established in 2002. Its members have advised our bishops on the measures necessary to safeguard our children. Board members also have advised our bishops how best to respond to priests against whom credible allegations of abuse have been made. The procedures for considering these allegations and the possible dismissal of accused priests have been improved greatly by rules adopted by the Holy See's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that eliminated serious obstacles to fair and effective action.

At this point one of our greatest concerns as a presbyterate is that there might be victims of sexual abuse, abused during their childhood or adolescence by one of our priests, who have not yet come forward for help. We urgently ask them to inform us of the harm that they have suffered, perhaps many years ago, so that we may offer fraternal support and contribute to the process of healing their hurt.

Our Resolutions

At his ordination every priest makes several solemn promises: to rely upon the Holy Spirit to care for the Lord's flock, to preach and teach the Catholic faith with fidelity, to celebrate the sacred mysteries in accord with the church's tradition, to pray without ceasing so as to implore mercy on God's people, to unite himself to Christ the High Priest for the salvation of all, and to obey his bishop. He renews these promises each year at the Chrism Mass with his brother priests and in the presence of the bishop. The resolutions we make at the Chrism Mass are:



- We resolve to unite ourselves more closely to Christ and to try to become more like him by joyfully sacrificing our own pleasure and ambition to bring his peace and love to our brothers and sisters.
- We resolve to be faithful ministers of the mysteries of God, to celebrate the eucharist and the other liturgical services with sincere devotion.
- We resolve to imitate Jesus Christ, the head and shepherd of the church, by teaching the Christian faith without thinking of our own profit, solely for the well-being of the people we were sent to serve.

After the priests have renewed these resolutions, the bishop seeks God's grace and renews his own commitment to apostolic service by stating:

- Pray also for me that despite my own unworthiness I may faithfully fulfill the office of apostle which Jesus Christ has entrusted to me. Pray that I may become more like our High Priest and Good Shepherd, the teacher and servant of all, and so be a genuine sign of Christ's loving presence among you.

It is important for us always to rejuvenate and regenerate God's loving plan for us. As St. John Vianney observed, "[t]he great misfortune for us parish priests is that our souls grow tepid."ⁱⁱⁱ Combating this all-too-human tendency has been the concern of our previous and present popes. Pope John Paul II said that [given the graces of baptism], "it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalistic ethic and a shallow religiosity."^{iv} For his part, Pope Benedict XVI offered both assessment and solution: "[T]he greatest concern of every Christian, especially of every consecrated person or minister of the altar, must be fidelity, loyalty to one's own vocation, as a disciple who wishes to follow the Lord. Faithfulness over time is the name of love, of a consistent, true and profound love for Christ the Priest. . . . This evidently supposes true intimacy with Christ in prayer, . . . in a way that is exclusive and spousal."^v It is only by God's grace, and our response by practicing the virtues, that such faithfulness over time can be accomplished.

Personal Commitment to Sanctity

Perhaps nothing that can be said about priesthood, particularly during these times, will carry much import or credibility without addressing the “one thing necessary,”^{vi} *holiness of life*. In this we have the stellar example of St. John Vianney. As his biographer recounts:

“Long before the first rays of dawn appeared . . . while Ars was as yet plunged in deep sleep, a flickering light might have been seen in the cemetery the surrounded the church. At that hour M. Vianney, lantern in hand, passed from his house into the church. The good soldier of Jesus Christ was going to his post of intercessor for the people. . . . The hours of the morning were spent in like manner, unless duty summoned him elsewhere. For a sick-call there was no need to go to the presbytery - people knew where to find him. There were days when he only left the church after the evening Angelus.”^{vii}

Such long hours in service to God’s people inspire us. So, too, do the words of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI:

[T]he Church therefore has a deep need to re-learn penance, to accept purification, . . . In one word we have to re-learn these essentials: conversion, prayer, penance, and the theological virtues. That is how we respond, and we need to be realistic in expecting that evil will always attack, from within and from outside, but the forces of good are also always present, and finally the Lord is stronger than evil and the Virgin Mary is for us the visible maternal guarantee that the will of God is always the last word in history.”^{viii}

Evangelization

In speaking of these things, we must not lose focus on the primary mission of the church: promoting the gospel. An essential part of the vocation of every baptized Christian includes reaching out to lapsed Catholics, ministering to those in need, inviting non-Catholics to experience our faith through the conversion process of the RCIA, and providing spiritual growth opportunities for those who want more. Throughout these “vast lands & waters we call home’ (Diocesan Mission Statement), clergy and religious do reach out to even the smallest gatherings of our people: in cities, towns, villages, even smaller communities; hospitals, nursing homes and prisons, and sometimes even vessels. Nothing must prevent us from continuing this effort.

Vocations

One indicator of a mature diocese is that its members foster numerous vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, religious and consecrated life. Catholic parents, along with all Catholics in our diocese, must look to the

future spiritual growth and wellbeing of the coming generations here at home in southeast Alaska, whose members will need priests, deacons and professed religious to serve and guide them in their respective journeys of faith.

The Diocese of Juneau is blessed with one seminarian, Mr. Steven Gallagher, who will be ordained a transitional deacon on Wednesday, August 11, 2010 at St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Juneau. God willing, he will be ordained a priest of our diocese on Saturday, April 30, 2011. We look forward to working and ministering with him as he continues to fulfill his vocation.

At the same time, we invite parents, grandparents, and members of our Native, Filipino, Latino, Samoan, Anglo/European, and other distinct groups among the Catholic faithful in the Diocese of Juneau to pray, speak, and act so as to foster priestly and religious vocations among the members of our local church. God always grants an abundance of the vocations needed to serve his people; it is our responsibility to call men to consider this priestly vocation just as Christ called the first disciples.



The Faithfulness of the People We Serve Inspires Us

When we hear these words, we sense the solace and the safety of being in the arms of Christ. It is akin to coming through very rough seas and into the breakwater area of a familiar harbor. Such a feeling of relief comes over us.

We, as priests, are aware of our Catholic people living in the world among people of many persuasions and ideologies. We recognize you may face many questions as regards the explanation of the Catholic faith and the scandals that have affected our church. Your steadfast faithfulness to Christ and his church in good times and in bad gives a tremendous sense of inspiration to us.

A great lesson is to be learned from our native brothers and sisters in the Tlingit culture. There is an expression especially heard in times of sorrow as at a funeral – BE STRONG. The members of the community say these words to the family to let them know that the whole community will be there for them in all their needs during their time of grief. We enable each other to be strong in facing the vicissitudes of life in the problems that come our way. With God all things are possible. If we truly believe that God is with his church till the end of time, our confidence will never be shaken. We are truly humbled and inspired by the faithfulness of the people we serve and offer prayers of thanksgiving for your presence, strength and support.

We Will Be There For You as You Have Been For Us

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13)

As your priests, we will be there for you as you have been there for us. This is our commitment. We are all called to serve God in his church in this time of crisis. Somehow, God in his infinite plan, has called us to serve his church at this time in history, during the joys and challenges of today. Relying on his strength and grace, our personal commitment is to sanctity and to serve each other with the fire and love that descended upon the early disciples at Pentecost. We recognize that our loyalty to Christ and his church will sustain us in these difficult times.

Strength in the Sacraments

Central to the lives of Catholics in Southeast Alaska, as elsewhere, is the frequent reception of the sacraments of penance and holy Eucharist. It is in these two sacraments that the Lord touches our lives most directly and deeply, healing us of sin and weakness and sharing with us his divine power. And yet, some of our Catholics in Southeast Alaska have stopped receiving these sacraments on any kind of regular basis. Some have opted not to come to Sunday Mass, but rather have traded the eucharistic meal for other activities (i.e., high school sports, regular fishing and hunting trips, etc.). We urge you to fulfill that precept of the church, based on the third commandment, obliging all Catholics to assist with the celebration of the sacrament of the holy Eucharist on all Sundays and other holy days of obligation, unless impeded due to illness or the exercise of the corporal works of mercy.

Weakened standards of morals thrive in an environment in which Catholics have given up on these sacraments. In Southeast Alaska and elsewhere the healing of our Catholic people and communities depends on the power that these sacraments offer us. Let us renew our Christian commitment to worship God every Sunday, to keep holy the Lord's Day, and thereby draw blessings down upon our families, parishes and missions.

Our Hopes

We, your priests and bishop, the members of the presbyterate of the Diocese of Juneau, hope that our fraternal support for each other, along with your prayers and God's grace, will always help us to be strong reflections of the living Christ. We hope that, by our standing deliberately and conscientiously "in the Person of Christ, the head of the Church," he may be apparent to you, his disciples in our time and in this Diocese. We hope that the Holy Spirit will use us as instruments of divine grace on your behalf, so that our entire ministry may tend toward the gift of salvation, yours and ours. Finally, we hope that, having prayed with confidence to the Father, we all may come at last to our heavenly home, where we will live forever with the saints of every time and place in communion with the Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.



CONCLUSION


We, the Bishop and priests of the Diocese of Juneau, come before God in thanksgiving for our share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. While we acknowledge that these days are challenging, we have witnessed Christ's saving presence in the challenges of the church's past. We pray with confidence that the church in our time will be filled with his saving grace which will strengthen us all. By our signatures below, every priest serving in this diocese affirms his personal recommitment to sanctity. Impelled by holy orders, motivated by love of God and you, his people, we beg God's healing grace upon us all.



Bishop Edward J. Burns



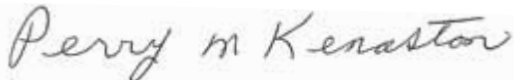
Fr. James R. Blaney, OMI



Fr. Patrick T. Casey, OMI



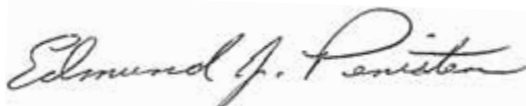
Fr. Peter F. Gorges



Fr. Perry M. Kenaston



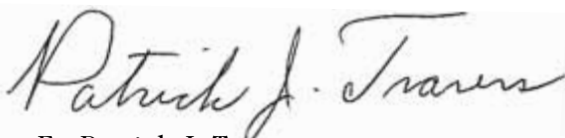
Fr. Jean-Paulin E. Lockulu



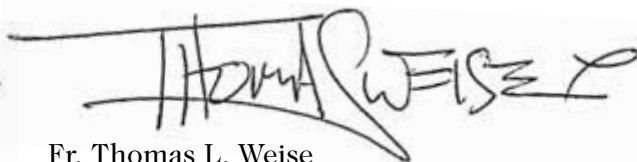
Fr. Edmund J. Penisten



Fr. Scott R. Settimo



Fr. Patrick J. Travers



Fr. Thomas L. Weise

¹Benedict XVI. "Letter Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the Anniversary of the "Dies Natalis" of the Cure of Ars, p. 1.

²Ibid, p. 5.

³Benedict XVI. "Letter Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the Anniversary of the "Dies Natalis" of the Cure of Ars, p. 5.

⁴John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 31.

⁵Benedict XVI. Vespers homily 12 May 2010. Fatima, Portugal.

⁶Cf. Lk 10:42

⁷Francis Trochu. *The Curé D'Ars: St Jean-Marie Baptiste Vianney*. London: Burns and Oats, 1927. p. 114-15.

⁸Benedict XVI. Discussion with reporters 12 May 2010. Enroute Fatima, Portugal.



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