

# Christmas On Frozen Frontier

By ED FORTIER

Portland, Ore. — (NC) — His name is Father Paul C. O'Connor, S.J. But to 28 Jesuit missionaries, many brothers and puns serving the far-flung Alaska missions he is a combination of St. Nicholas and an efficient quartermaster.

As Christmas nears for the shock troops who man Christianity's front lines on the Bering Sea coast opposite hostile Russia, Father O'Connor knows that his fellow missionaries celebrate the birth of Christ rich in spiritual blessings.

Their special material blessings for the great day may be an orange, an apple or even a tin of pipe tobacco.

A former professor at Gonzaga University in his native Spokane, Wash., with graduate work in Europe's finest universities, Father O'Connor's best equipment for his job as procurator and executive director of the Alaska Jesuit Missions is the nearly three decades he spent as a soldier for Christ in Alaska's bleak Arctic.

"It is not a question of building expansion programs with me," said Father O'Connor. "It is simply supplying food to my missionaries so that they can survive. Many of them have government jobs like that of a postmaster in a tiny village.

"The salary that they get does not make them rich, but it does help them survive. Most of them are pretty handy with a fishing rod, a net or a gun. They also count around for driftwood to keep the home fires burning."

A tall, impressive man who belies his more than 60 years, the Alaska Jesuits' procurator describes the survival work he directs from his Portland, Oregon, headquarters in these words.

"The Alaska missionary in the tundra cooks for himself, is his own janitor, washes his own clothes. But to have a full-time government job in order that he might survive is not what it should be. Here is where I come in.

"I go to Alaska generally in February and get the food and fuel orders of my missionaries. I then return, process the orders and arrange for the freight.

"Freight, incidentally, costs me \$150 a ton just to get it on location. The routes are devious. Some go to Alaska by way of Seward and Nenana and then float down the Yukon river. These orders are handled as often as five times before reaching the missions.

"Others go by Alaska Steamship Company vessel to St. Michael, Nome and Kotzebue.

Still others are handled by the North Star, a government ship which calls at isolated places like King Island and Nelson Island. The routing of supplies is rather tricky, because if I miss the boat there is no other to follow.

"After the food is ordered and freighted to Alaska, I look around for the cold cash needed to pay the bills. A missionary costs about \$3,000 to \$5,000 a year to live in an isolated district in Alaska. To live means to live without luxuries. Many of them do not taste an apple or an orange more than twice a year. Fresh vegetables during the winter are simply non-existent."

In meeting the never-ending task of providing food and fuel for the outpost missions, Father O'Connor misses no tricks. He arranges for the sale of Christmas cards done by Eskimo and Jesuit artists, gives lectures, sells postcards, shows movies, reviews books and writes articles.

His best source of mission income, however, is a monthly newsletter which he sends to Jesuit benefactors and potential benefactors throughout the world.

Through his skillfully written newsletter which reports on the rugged life of the Alaska Jesuits, the Portland-based procurator brings the distant world of the outpost missions into the reader's mind, heart — and quite often his pocketbook. He makes a contribution and becomes one of Father O'Connor's Co-Missioners.

As a former member and chairman of the Alaska Housing Authority, Father O'Connor is known as the salesman who engineered federal assistance in building and repairing 700 isolated Eskimo homes.

He now considers himself a "life insurance" salesman. He reports that in making personal contacts with prospective supporters, the conversation follows these lines:

"Is that you, Father O'Connor? What are you doing here?"

"I am in the insurance business."

"Insurance business? What kind?"

"Celestial Life. I don't like to call it Eternal Fire Insurance."

## Council to Keep Parish System

Vatican City—(RNS)—A draft decree reaffirming the vital importance of the parish in the Church's structure was discussed at the seventh meeting of the Central Preparatory Commission for the Second Vatican Council, the Vatican Radio reported.

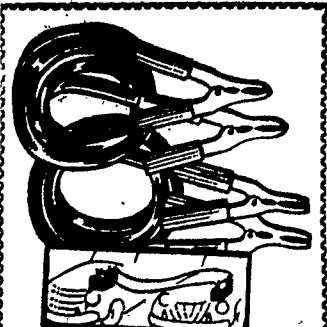
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demonstrate how valid is the solid parochial structure which has endured throughout the ages.

"This institution, in its present form," it said, "dates back to the sixth century, a time when historical events, and especially local circumstances, made it, in fact, necessary. Then Canon Law laid down its rules and developed it by giving it its uniformity of government, as we see it today.

"Actually, every diocese is divided into parishes and each of these has its own church, where the people of the parish can meet and where divine worship is carried out. It has its own priest in charge of it who is called the parish priest."



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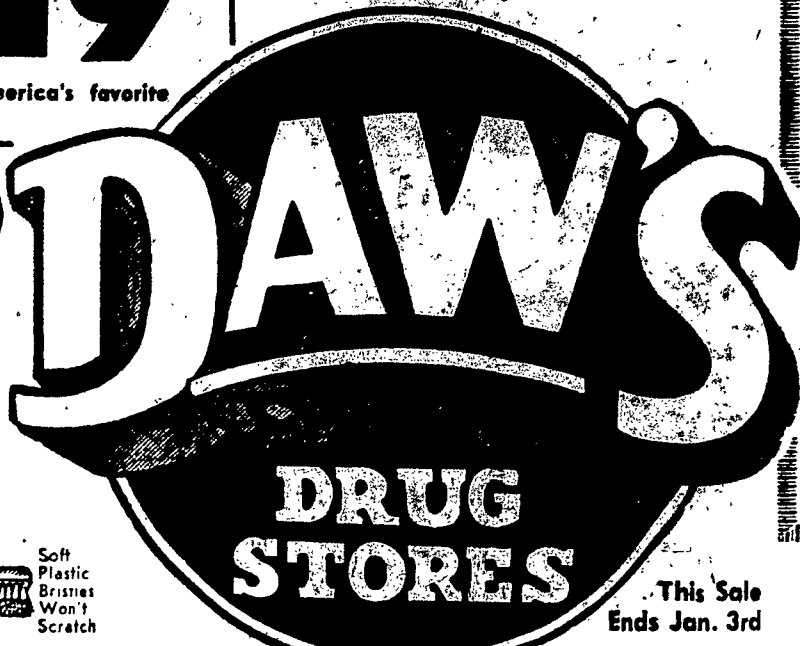
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