

School started in 1900

# Bishop says St. Mary's School to close

St. Mary's School on the Andreafsky River will close in May, according to Bishop Michael Kaniecki, bishop of the Diocese of Fairbanks.

"This is not an easy decision for me to make, for I am well aware of the tremendous influence St. Mary's has had in the lives of so many students, families and teachers," he said. "And so, there is a real sadness about this announcement. On the other hand, I am a realist, and I see clearly that the data presented to me supports my decision — in fact, almost dictates it."

The decision came after a task force was appointed in August 1986 to investigate and report on their findings. The study involved about 16 villages and communities and included 328 personal interviews.

Among questions the study focused on were what effects village schools

erected by the state as a result of the Molly Hootch case had on St. Mary's and whether there was still a need for a boarding school on the lower Yukon.

Since its origin in 1900 at Akulurak, St. Mary's Mission and School has undertaken a number of "careers." It started as a home for orphans and victims of the flu epidemics, becoming an elementary school for these and other students.

In 1950, the current location was selected, and in 1952, a high school program was initiated. It provided education and boarding facilities for grades one through 12.

As times changed, so did St. Mary's. By 1974, St. Mary's became solely a secondary school program, a combination day and boarding school, serving grades nine through 12.

Bishop Kaniecki urged people who

support the school to be thankful for its years of service and not to lament its closing.

"I ask you to join me in thanking God for the many, many blessings He

has bestowed upon all of us in the past 87 years, while at the same time, asking the Lord for wisdom and knowledge in our continued service of the people of God."