

Saint Herman's offers alcoholism training

by Mike Rostad
for the Tundra Times

KODIAK — Besides studying doctrine, Scripture and church history, students at Saint Herman's Orthodox Theological Seminary here are finding how to free those caught in the grip of alcoholism.

An alcohol counseling training program, known as SCAAT — South Central Area Alcohol Training — was implemented into the seminary's curriculum last year and is designed to equip students with a better understanding of alcoholism and to provide them with training that can help them get certified as alcohol counselors.

Students successfully completing the primary alcohol counseling courses and passing a test administered by the State Certification Review Board will be eligible for certification as counselors. Prior to this year, completion of courses was all that was necessary for certification eligibility.

In February, a certification test was given to 16 students. The test will also be given Saturday.

Two years before the program was added to St. Herman's curriculum, instructor Francia Schultz and Matushka Alexandria Safchuk worked many hours putting together a 100-page proposal requesting funding from the state. However, the state turned it

down, according to Father Joseph Kreta, dean of St. Herman's.

But Father Kreta said the hard work was not in vain. He discussed the proposal with Kodiak Sen. Fred Zharoff, who joined forces with former Rep. David Thompson, persuading the Alaska State Legislature to provide the seminary with \$63,000 to get the program going.

SCAAT consists of four core classes: substance abuse counseling, substance abuse as a contemporary problem, emergency medical training, and ethics and the law. Normally classes are offered to students at St. Herman's on a weekly basis during the semester.

Courses are also offered during a compressed time period for those who are unable to take classes throughout the semester. Students who must travel from Kodiak Island villages or elsewhere in Alaska to attend the classes can find room and board at the seminary for a nominal fee.

SCAAT also offers workshops and special sessions dealing with a variety of topics related to alcoholism. Sometimes the classes are taken to the people in the outlying communities. SCAAT Program Coordinator Rachel Mason and students traveled to the Kodiak Island village of Old Harbor to present a workshop on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. SCAAT also sponsored a workshop in the village

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of Larsen Bay.

During the fall and spring semesters, SCAAT sponsored an Alcohol Information Exchange aimed primarily at those involved with the liquor industry. The main objectives of the program were to heighten awareness of alcohol-related issues and improve communication between the liquor industry and law enforcement and alcohol treatment agencies.

Workshops on after care and relapse prevention, Alaska Native counseling and stress management have either been presented or are being planned.

Rachel Mason says SCAAT continues to broaden its scope, trying to reach as many segments of society that are affected by alcohol abuse as possible. Through surveys and an appeal appearing in an article of a seminary newsletter, SCAAT asked readers to list possible topics for future workshops and classes.

Mason is optimistic about the program's value and effectiveness. She reports that the State Office on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, which evaluated the program, commended the staff "for their diligent efforts for bringing this program into compliance with state requirements."

Students who have taken SCAAT classes have already been applying the knowledge they have gained.

"I try to use what I've learned for

the benefit of my people, to help them change their ways," a third-year student at St. Herman's Seminary said. "Everything that we were taught can be applied."

Second-year student Evan Nicolai, from the village of Kwethluk, has received certification Level I and assists Mason in class.

A seminarian sits on the advisory board, which provides direction for SCAAT. Other board members include representatives from the court system and law enforcement agencies, mental and physical health agencies, alcohol treatment programs, the Kodiak Area Native Association, the seminary, the media, the Kodiak Ministerial Alliance, the Coast Guard and the Kodiak Community College.

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The SCAAT program is available to residents in a wide area including Kodiak, the Kenai Peninsula, Cordova, the Alaska Peninsula, the Aleutian Chain and the Pribilofs.

Since many of the students at St. Herman's come from villages along the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers, the program goes far beyond the South Central area and touches just about every region in the state.

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