

Priest completes service to his people

by Louise Donhauser

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"Outstanding" was the word used to describe Russian Orthodox Priest Nicolai Michael, who gave over 20 years of his life to the Russian Orthodox faith. He conducted services for the Yup'ik and Athabaskan people who lived along the Kuskokwim River, from the larger community of Bethel all the way upriver to the tiny village of Nikolai. He served 35 villages.

In the fall of 1912, August 24, Nicolai Michael was born near the Kilbuck mountains, then in the spring of 1984 the Yup'ik died after a bout with cancer.

Services for Michael were conducted by Alaska's highest ranking Russian Orthodox bishop. With more than 100 people in attendance, His Grace Bishop Gregory, who was assisted by nearly a dozen other Alaskan priests, conducted the services for Father Michael in Kwethluk.

Pastor of St. Innocent Cathedral of Anchorage Father Nicholas Harris remembered Father Michael.

"He had a very pleasing personality. He was a very joyful person and one who appreciated the little things in life. . . From the village of Kwethluk four young Eskimo men have been ordained as priests. I regard that as outstanding."



Father Nicolai Michael, 1912-1984.

Michael also saw, before he died, the construction of a new church to replace one which had been built in 1935.

Father Michael is survived by his three sons; Ivan, James and Ted, who reside in Kwethluk.

His surviving daughters who live in Kwethluk are; Anita Graves, Martha M. Nicolai, Agnes Ashepak and Helen Larson. Another daughter, Lillian McGill lives in Bethel. He also has 23 grandchildren.

While he was dedicated to his faith he also made significant contributions to his home village. He opened Kwethluk's first post office then went on to open the first store in the late 50's

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and early 60's. He also served as mayor of the community along with serving in the Alaska National Guard.

One May 10, 1962 he was ordained as a priest.