

Bethel Official Answers Fr. Morris' Ideas on Hi- Schools

By Michael Rowan
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We would like to reply to a letter printed last week in the Tundra Times, a letter attacking the idea of a regional school at Bethel, written by Fr. John Morris, a Jesuit.

Fr. Morris argues throughout for village high schools, saying in part that Bethel would develop a "teen age culture" which he claims would hurt the old people. Thus, no school for Bethel.

We do not follow this logic, nor do we have anything against teen-agers. Bethel, in fact, has tripled in population in the last 12 years. Over 2 million dollars of construction will take place here in the next two years, regardless of the regional school. We are not afraid of a teen age culture.

"How does one keep a horde of young people occupied in constructive ways?" asks Fr. Morris in his letter. You plan for it. You build community halls. You sink hundreds of thousands of dollars into it. That's what this Council is doing. That's how we plan to do it.

We do not especially relish Fr. Morris's opinion of Bethel. We disagree with him that a school at Bethel will be a "separation from environment" for the Eskimo people. He forgets, or never knew, that the main argument IN THE VILLAGES for the Bethel school was because of its proximity. (20% of Bethel's people are visitors, traveling through). We have received letters from more than 40 villages over the last two years supporting the school here. These are Eskimo people who want a large comprehensive school in the nearby Eskimo city, Bethel. They are not foolish enough to think that high schools can be placed in every village in Alaska.

I do not know why Fr. Morris argues so much against boarding schools. Anyone with experience in education knows that you need 7 or 8 teachers, at least, to build the curriculum, and thus you have to bring the students to the school. In fact, don't the Jesuits have two boarding schools in Alaska? St. Mary's & Copper Center are the sites.

We are very much in favor of intelligent discussion of regional high schools. But we dislike someone speaking for the Eskimo people, when the people have already spoken, and when the statements being made are largely misrepresentative.