

IN THE SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY

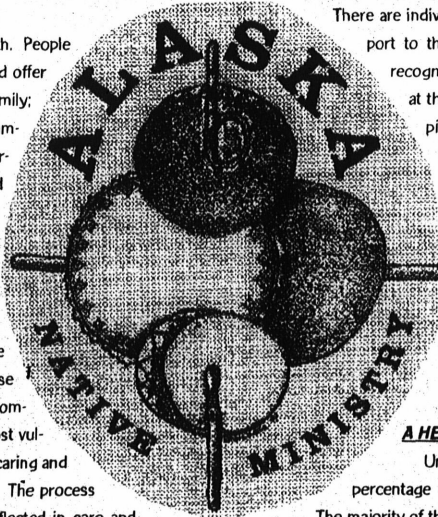
A message from the Alaska Native Ministry

For many years, Native people have sought out ways to live in the city yet carry forward the spirit of community that exists in villages.

One aspect of that spirit manifests itself when there is a death. People of the community set aside their differences, come together and offer support to the family. Food is prepared, brought to the family; together men build a coffin and the women line it. Neither the family nor the body are left alone. Arrangements are made and services conducted. After the service, the people take the deceased to the graveyard and together they bury their friend, their loved one, a member of their community. But care doesn't stop there!

Considering the outcome of what happens as a result of these activities, it's easier to see how healing these activities can be.

When death takes someone from the community, the people share their thoughts and memories with the family. Through these thoughts, prayers and outward expressions of love, from the community, support is provided. When death occurs, people are most vulnerable. If they choose to participate in the process of grieving, caring and sharing, thoughts of financial burden become less important. The process takes on the form of respect for the dead. This respect is reflected in care and thoughtfulness. Even the acknowledgment and acceptance of death is fulfilled when a handful of dirt is tossed upon the casket. The filling of the grave and the final action of placing a cross, provides healing. These examples illustrate the importance of community and involvement in the community.



A CELEBRATION OF LIFE

There are individual efforts by Native people in Anchorage who provide support to their other Native people. Their efforts and service deserve recognition by the community. Examples of those efforts take place at the Alaska Native Medical Center. Patients, as in any other hospital, come for medical care, surgery, to have a baby or to die. Although the physical healing that is accomplished here is important, too often the Spiritual needs seem less important. There are some clergy who visit the sick and Native people who take time to provide music, bring Communion and offer assistance to the patients. It is through their efforts that the Spiritual dimension of the patients is strengthened. Interestingly in the act of giving, the visitor is usually strengthened and nourished as well.

A HELPING HAND

Unfortunately, there is yet another place where there is a high percentage of Native people. Jails hold many of our men and women. The majority of them are there because of the abuse of alcohol or drugs. More often than not, they cannot remember what they did to bring them there. Yet they are there spending their lives in a place where they dare not even express their inner most thoughts or feelings. Jail is indeed a place where the hearts of people can be hardened.

STRENGTHENING THE NATIVE COMMUNITY IN ANCHORAGE

Urban Natives have been working, shopping, involved in business, or in management, contributing to society and meeting demands of their family schedules. Although they do not stand out as Native people, it does not mean that they set aside their heritage nor their identity. The most significant struggle that is encountered, is ignorance. The old expression of stereotyping is alive, and dilutes the minds of many, including Native people. The question therefore is how can we come together to start talking about this?

The Native ministry program of the Archdiocese of Anchorage will offer a monthly Mass for the Native community. The mass will become a regular service. It will be held every third Sunday of the month. After Mass, there will be time to discuss these issues and to consider how the Spirit of Community that exists in villages can be reflected and developed here in Anchorage.

The first mass will be celebrated by Fr. Tom Gallagher. It will start at **2:00 p.m. on Sunday, March 16th**. At this first gathering, a special light lunch will be provided and Ellen Savage, an Athabascan Elder will talk about her home village of Holy Cross and about traditions. The mass will be held at the Holy Cross Parish located off of Lake Otis and Lore Road.

Please come and join us! If you have any questions, call Tiny Devlin at 258-7898.