

St. Herman's Seminary in Kodiak receives important accreditation

by Mike Rostad

Saint Herman's Seminary in Kodiak has reached a significant goal with the granting of full institutional accreditation by the Pacific Association of Schools and Colleges (PASC). Father Peter Kreta called the achievement a "monumental occasion and a milestone."

The agency's semi-annual meeting was held in Los Angeles and was attended by Seminary Dean and founder, Father Joseph Kreta; Academic Dean and professor, Fr. Peter Kreta, and their wives, Matushkas Marie and Marilyn; and Christine Meholic, who is also administrative officer for the seminary.

The PASC committee used only superlatives to describe the content of self study, "a criteria for applying for accreditation," says Meholic, chairperson of the seminary's accreditation committee. "It only used words like 'great' and 'excellent.' These are not just pats on the back."

"We have to be grateful before God," says Fr. Joseph. "If anything the seminary has done has been fruitful, it is because God has given us His blessing, His guidance... to try to prepare for the challenges we have. We can only hope and pray that, what we have done, has been well pleasing to Him and we can only pray that He will continue to guide us."

When news of accreditation reached the campus of Saint Herman's Seminary in Kodiak, the students shared the joy.

"It makes me proud of what the faculty has accomplished after all these years, and to be here to share their joy of getting accreditation," says Ivan Gumlickpuk, a

second year student from the village of New Stuyahok.

Father Peter puts the implications of accreditation in these terms: "A governing board of commissioners who are well educated, working with other national accrediting agencies, came to this school, looked at the files, looked at the courses, looked at the professors, ... the academics ... library, physical plant, financial situation and said, 'Yes, this is a creditable school. Truly it is to be marked and ranked with other schools throughout the country on a post secondary level.'"

The process of seeking accreditation, which has lasted over 10 years, has "greatly changed the school," says Jeffrey Macdonald, Old Testament and Church History professor who is working toward his doctorate in early Christian studies. "It produced enormous changes in the curriculum and standardized our internal procedures and led our school to adopt more generally accepted norms. Gaining accreditation put a seal of approval on this 10 years of development; confirmed the correctness of the changes that were made and the direction that we've taken."

For the students, most of whom are Alaska Natives relying on Native corporation moneys and state loans for financial aid, accreditation may bring long awaited financial assistance.

Seminarian Jimmy Larson of Napaskiak, speaks on behalf of the students. "I am deeply encouraged, because (accreditation) offers me feasible benefits, such as grants and loans. Not only will I be able to transfer credits, but this will help financially."

Jeffrey Macdonald sees other assets to accreditation. There is "potential for growth. (Saint

Herman's Seminary) will make undergraduate theological education available to people who don't have the benefit of Native corporation money and State of Alaska loans."

The road to accreditation has been long and rocky, fraught with obstructions, detours and surprises which made administration and staff wonder if they had set out on the right course. There are times when we "just sat there and looked out the window, wondering 'How can we solve this problem? How can we answer this question?'" says Father Joseph. "The difficulty we had at the very beginning was size."

Page 10, please



Seminarian, Jimmy Larson, from Napaskiak looks forward to the financial benefits of accreditation at St. Herman's Seminary.

Photo by Mike Rostad

St. Herman's accredited . . .

Continued from page 9

When St. Herman's opened its doors in 1973, it was a small pastoral school whose purpose was to train Alaska Natives as priests, deacons and readers. National accreditation wasn't even a consideration at that time.

"Students would be ordained and sent back to their own people, their own traditions, their own culture... (and) lifestyle, in a way in which they were comfortable, living the Orthodox faith, understanding the Orthodox faith and still not being required to change drastically," says Fr. Joseph.

"But we realized that there was so much more that could be done, and if that was to be so, the school would have to be enhanced in its outreach, excellence and schol-



Students at St. Herman's listen attentively to professor Fr. Peter Kreta.

Photo by Mike Rostad

arly approach. Under the approval of the Synod of Bishops, it became a four year Theological Seminary.

St. Herman's accreditation from PASC is the "culmination of efforts" of the faculty, staff, Board of Trustees, students - "everyone

involved with the Seminary in any way," says Fr. Joseph. "Everyone (on the accreditation team) worked very, very hard, very selflessly and gave themselves completely to the process. It's the fruit and labors of everyone."

Although the faculty and administration are credited for doing the bulk of the work in applying for accreditation, the students also played an integral part in the process.

Their involvement was "paramount," says Fr. Peter.

"We took seriously (their) recommendations ... as to what they thought would make this school a better school," says Fr. Joseph. "The faculty met for many hours on recommendations, questions, even challenges that students had

concerning the catalog and handbook." The students also evaluated the teachers in an anonymous system, which encouraged them to be open and uninhibited. Those evaluations were compiled and reviewed by the faculty, administration, Board members and PASC.

Last spring students met individually with PASC's on-site team in lengthy interviews.

With accreditation, St. Herman's Seminary has reached a new plateau, says Christine Meholic. "We're at a higher level internally, in terms of our policies and academics. We're at a new level to continue on for the next 20 years."