

Time pinch for priests means earlier service

St. Xavier moves services up half an hour

By Brielle Schaeffer
Reporter, Valdez Star

Resident priests in rural parishes are a rarity these days, and the Catholic Church in Valdez, St. Frances Xavier, is no exception. The nationwide shortage of priests is forcing the parish to change the time of its Sunday service from 10:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. in order to host visiting clergymen, said Sister Marie Brent, the resident Pastoral Administrator of the church.

"The problem is they all have to be in Anchorage or Girdwood Sunday night," Brent said. "I wish ERA had the same flights as they do during the week. We're kind of caught in a bind with ERA flights and timing."

Valdez is not the only community affected by the deficiency of priests. According to Brent, the parishes in Big Lake, Talkeetna, Glenallen and Trapper Creek all do not have permanent ministers. St. Francis Xavier

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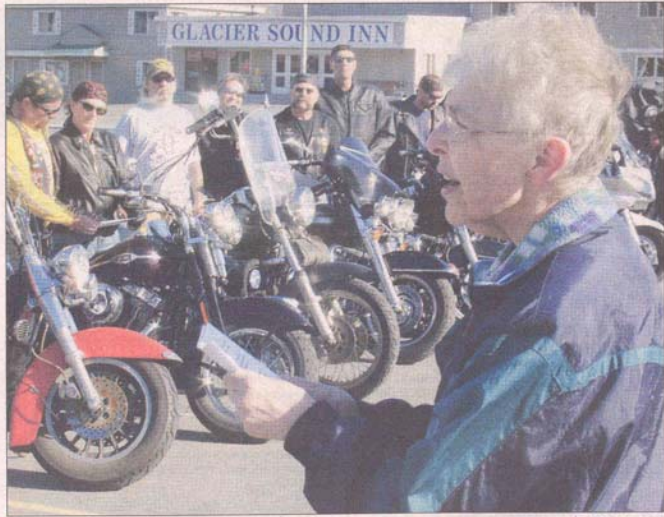
The Archbishop extended Brent the permission to perform the homily when needed and she has been giving the sermon at St. Francis Xavier for 30 years now.

After one mass where Brent said the homily, an older woman tourist came up to her with tears in her eyes and told her that it was the first time in her life that she had seen a woman lead her catholic service.

Brent said she would like to "definitely like to see changes in this area," concerning the ordination of women and married priests.

"The people are ready but the wheels move slowly and cautiously toward change," she said.

Father Tom Lilly and Father Jaime Mencias, priests from St. Elizabeth Anne Seton in Anchorage, volunteered to visit Valdez every



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Sister Marie Brent during a spring ritual in Valdez, the Blessing of the Bikes.

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Valdez is not the only community affected by the deficiency of priests. According to Brent, the parishes in Big Lake, Talkeetna, Glenallen and Trapper Creek all do not have permanent ministers. St. Francis Xavier has not had a priest in residence for 20 years.

"Fewer men are choosing to become priests for many reasons, not just the celibacy issue," Brent said. In the past there was only one outlet to serve the church as a nun or a priest, she explained.

"That's not the case at all now," she said,

noting that community members have even led the service.

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Father Tom Lilly and Father Jaime Mencias, priests from St. Elizabeth Anne Seton in Anchorage, volunteered to visit Valdez every first and third Sunday of the month beginning Oct. 18.

Mencias said that he is for the possibility of women ordination. "I'm not really against women ordination, but I still pray for men priests," he said.

St. Frances Xavier is attended by roughly 96 families, Brent said.