

Holding Down the Fort in Valdez

Meet Sister Marie Ann Brent

When Sister Marie Ann Brent came to Alaska in 1970, she planned on staying one month to work on special projects for the Diocese of Juneau.

Thirty-five years later, this Sister of the Holy Family is still going strong in the state that she now calls home.

She has been active in the Archdiocese of Anchorage since 1980. She started the Unalaska/Dutch Harbor Mission and remained there until 1986. Following her stint in Unalaska, she served as the equivalent of a Parish Administrator in the fishing village of Dillingham.

In 1993 she moved to Valdez, the terminus of the Alaska Pipeline, where she currently serves as the Parish Director.

The Valdez (say 'Val-deez') Parish was officially founded in 1908. In 2003, the parish joyfully observed the 100-year anniversary of the very first mass celebrated there.

Currently about 115 families representing widely varied multinational and racial backgrounds including Vietnamese, Phillipino, Thai, and Indonesian make up the parish.

"We also have lots of people working at different levels at the Alyeska Pipeline Terminal."

"The parish is absolutely phenomenal!" said Sister Marie Ann. "The people have taken ownership. If I am unable to lead the service and there is not a priest coming that day, they form a team and take over. They are using their gifts to keep it alive, they are a vital and prayerful parish."

Sister Marie Ann also noted that the parish is actively involved in social justice issues and outreach. "That's what keeps me going," she said.

Even with a very active and involved parish, Sister Marie Ann has her plate full. She offers pastoral counsel, organizes liturgical ministries and works on the finance council. When a priest is able to make it into Valdez, all advance preparations for the visit must be made by Sister Marie Ann or a Lay Presider.

"I am responsible to see that the Prayers of the Faithful are ready, the liturgical books out and

organ as we have three Liturgies on the weekend."

"The Archbishop has always seen that we have a priest for at least a week at Christmas and Holy Week and Easter," said Sr. Marie Ann. "The people are extremely welcoming and hospitable. The



Sister Marie Ann Brent enjoys being a part of the vital and active parish in Valdez. Photo courtesy John Roscoe, The Catholic Anchor.

folks make sure the visiting priest feels welcome and is well fed!"

Weather can be a problem when priests try to get in and out of the town. "Fr. Bill Hanrahan was to fly out Saturday afternoon, but the weather went down and the plane couldn't get in. In fact, we've been 3 days without a plane! This makes week 4 without a priest." Said Sister Marie Ann. "The people really appreciate a priest when they finally see one!"

Even with a very active and involved parish, Sister Marie Ann has her plate full. She offers pastoral counsel, organizes liturgical ministries and works on the finance council.

"For a parish of our size, we have a very large, young family population," said Sr. Marie Ann.

marked, sufficient hosts and wine. Liturgical ministers for each Mass and frequently take a turn at the