

# Alaskan Catholics set anniversary events

This week, the Catholic Church in Alaska celebrates the 100th anniversary of its coming to the 49th state.

The church arrived in Alaska only 12 years after the lifting of the ban on all Western missionary activity imposed during Russian ownership of the land. Russian Orthodoxy was the only major religion tolerated during that epoch, dating from 1741 when Vitus Bering crossed the sea which now bears his name.

A second part of the celebration this year commemorates the bicentennial of the first mass offered in Alaska and the first Catholic baptism. Both were performed by Spanish friars on May 13, 1779, on Suemez Island, near Ketchikan.

One hundred years later, Archbishop Charles Seghers established the first Catholic parish, on May 3, 1879, also in southeastern Alaska.

The anniversary is of special significance to the people of Alaska's first Roman Catholic diocese, because of the upcoming installation of the Most Rev. Michael H. Kenny as the third bishop of southeast Alaska. The ceremony will take place in the auditorium of Juneau-Douglas High School at 7:30 p.m. June 15, and the Most Rev. Francis T. Hurley, Archbishop of Anchorage and former Bishop of Juneau will be the installing prelate.

The new ordinary holds the distinction of being one of 26 priests from around the world who were ordained bishops in St. Peter's basilica, Rome, by Pope John Paul II. His selection for this honor was a manifestation of the supreme pontiff's interest in the church's missionary work.

Bishop Kenny was born June 26,

1937 in Hollywood, Calif. He was ordained to the priesthood in St. Eugene's Cathedral, Santa Rosa, on March 30, 1963, serving as chancellor of that diocese since 1972.

The diocese of Juneau comprises 37,566 square miles and serves more than 5,000 Catholics in southeast Alaska.

Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church in Big Lake will be blessed and dedicated today at 6 p.m. The officiating prelate will be the Most Rev. Francis T. Hurley, Archbishop of Anchorage.

The mass will be concelebrated with the pastor, Rev. Gerard T. Ryan and neighboring members of the clergy. The Archbishop will also confer the Sacrament of Confirmation on young people from the neighboring parishes of Palmer, Wasilla and Big Lake. Following the ceremony, a pot-luck buffet dinner will be served in the parish hall.

The history of the parish goes back many years, to the days when members were served by the pastor of St. Michael's parish in Palmer. A fire destroyed the Big Lake church in 1967 and plans were made during 1977 for its reconstruction. The building which will be dedicated this Saturday has been rebuilt on the foundation of the church that was destroyed.

At present, Rev. Ryan serves about 50 Catholic families, scattered throughout the Matanuska-Susitna Valley in the towns of Talkeetna, Willow, Trappers Creek and Big Lake. He assumed the pastorate five years ago, having previously served as associate pastor of St. Anthony's parish in Baton Rouge, La., and before that as a missionary for 12 years in Nigeria.