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EXTENSION

The Magazine of Mission America



**Extension's 1994 Lumen Christi Award honors
the last Jesuit in Michigan's Upper Peninsula**



Photo courtesy of Lilly Afscan

‘All come together in the Church’

NAME: Lilly Afscan

BORN: December 8, 1952, in Pilot Station, Alaska

VOCATION: Religious education teacher

PASTIMES: Skin stitching, Eskimo dancing, camping

PETS: Three dogs — Candy, Jammer and Bucket

PERSONAL INSPIRATION: Villager Justina Mike, 85, who “truly lives the examples and teachings of Christ”

Lilly Afscan, a Yup'ik mother of five, has passed on the Faith for nearly 30 years as a volunteer catechism teacher in far-flung St. Marys, Alaska. Her parish encompasses 18 remote villages near Alaska's rugged west coast.

While Lilly Afscan was growing up in the Yukon River village of Pilot Station, Alaska, the Yup'ik Eskimo woman's godparents were very involved in the Catholic Church. “They taught catechism in their home,” she remembers. “We would go over there once a week, and my godmother would teach us about the Faith.”

Christ's teachings are very similar to those of the Yup'ik people, Afscan says, so she learned about God's goodness from both traditions.

Her godparents' work for the mission parish and their deep faith made a lasting impression on the girl. “What my godparents did was something that has always been in my heart — to do the same service as they did,” says Afscan, who is now 41. “I watched them do this, and their lives seemed to be more full and happy.”

Afscan got the chance to follow in her elders' footsteps several years later when the Catholic school in her new home of St. Marys, Alaska, closed. “It was scary knowing that [the teachers] were going to leave and not knowing how we were

going to keep up with our faith,” she says.

The Yup'ik elders, who encouraged church involvement, began seeking volunteers to teach religious education classes, and the high school student stepped forward. With some training, Afscan began teaching one CCD class each week in the village's mission church.

Ever since, the mother of five has spent as many as three nights a week teaching the Faith to village children in cramped quarters adjacent to the church.

Afscan also volunteers and studies at the diocesan Native Ministry Training Center, which was started in St. Marys with help from Extension. What Afscan learns about liturgy planning or about instructing catechists, Eucharistic ministers and lectors, she shares with parish leaders from other villages.

“The hardest part of my work is real commitment [from others] — commitment to do the whole work from beginning to end,” Afscan says. However, her dedication encourages others to get involved.

Despite all her volunteer work,

family commitment remains most important to Afscan, who spends several weeks camping near the ocean each August with her children and parents. There, they catch as much salmon as they can. They dry, smoke and store the fish to help feed the family during the long Arctic winter.

Afscan says raising her family never kept her from her church work because of her late husband's tremendous support. “He was very strong in his spirituality,” she says. “He would always say, ‘The bell is ringing [for a parish function]. One of us should go.’ Usually he would ask me to go and pray for us with the community.”

Uniting 18 diverse and scattered villages — each with its own practices, traditions and ways of speaking — is not easy for the Church of the Nativity Parish, which has only a deacon and a lay pastoral administrator in residence. However, the people strive to work together and pass on their Faith.

“We all have the same basic teaching as Christ,” she says. “We all come together in the Church.”



THE LAST JESUIT
MISSIONARY ON
MICHIGAN'S UPPER
PENINSULA —
EXTENSION'S 17TH
ANNUAL LUMEN
CHRISTI AWARD
RECIPIENT —
BROUGHT GOD'S
LOVE TO THE
CHIPPEWA PEOPLE

BY CLAUDIA LEOPOLD

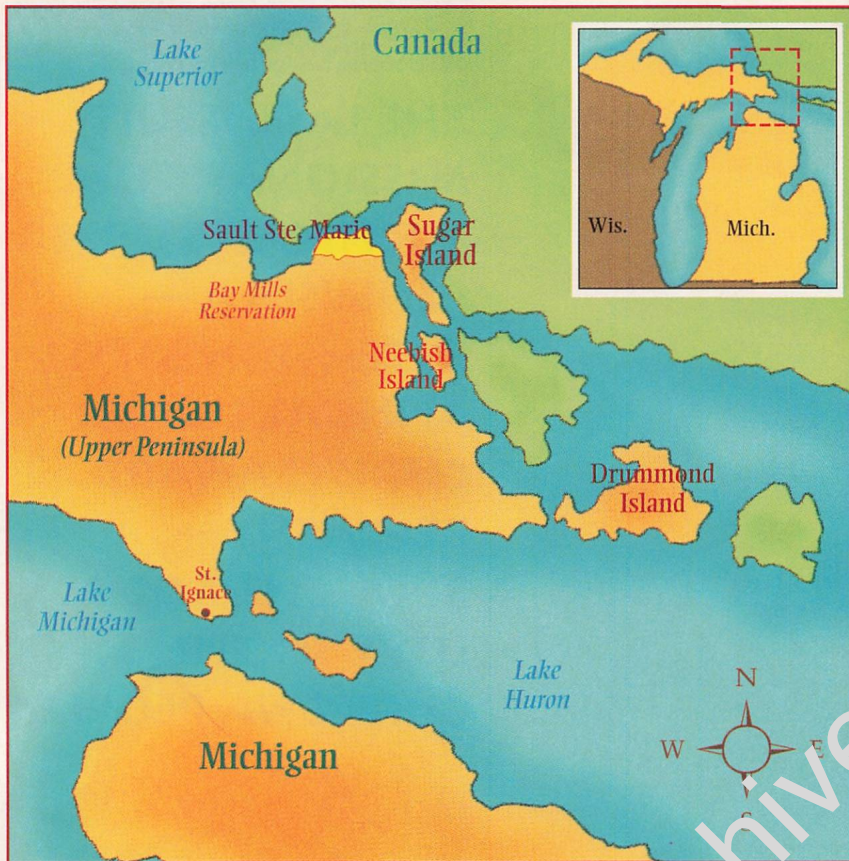
THEY CALL HIM 'GOOD HEART'

By his own admission, Father Joe Lawless does not talk much. As a young man, however, an awareness of God's goodness began to permeate his thinking and attitudes. "I decided I wanted to tell people about God's love and mercy."

That is why, even though his father, grandfather, uncle and great-uncle were all doctors, Joe Lawless became a priest. "When I first started college, I was pre-med, but I decided the only way to return God's goodness was to speak about Him."

For 46 years, this shy Jesuit missionary from Toledo, Ohio, brought the Gospel message to the people of Michigan's Upper Peninsula ("the U.P.") through his words and his life. "You walk in the presence of the Risen Christ when you're with him," says a woman from Sault Ste. Marie.

Father Lawless is the perfect representative to receive Extension's 1994 Lumen Christi Award, agree all those who know him. Part of a three-century Jesuit missionary tradition in this snowshoe region bordering Canada, he is the last in a long line of Jesuits to serve in the Diocese of Marquette. In a sense, this year's award honors all the Jesuits who have served the Native Americans



Map Illustration by Tom Lunaburg

Photo below courtesy of Father Joe Lawless; photo right by Randall McCune/Michigan Travel Bureau; photo far right by Richard Balluck



Father Lawless provided transportation so that Native American children from all over the U.P. could enjoy Catholic summer camps. His favorite season in this spectacular country is autumn, when maple trees remind him of the glory of God.



here with heroic sacrifices since Saint Isaac Jogues offered the first Mass in 1641.

Now 83, Father Lawless spent nearly half his life ministering to the Chippewa people in this Great Lakes diocese. He lived as modestly as the poorest of his parishioners and showed the love of Christ by literally giving the shirt off his back to the poor he encountered.

"Through his own example, Father Lawless taught the Indians to share what little they had with those who were more needy," wrote Most Reverend James H. Garland, Bishop of Marquette. "Father Lawless truly was the 'Light of Christ' to the Native Americans whom he served, as well as to the entire Church of Marquette and the community in general."

'I'LL GET INTERESTED'

After ordination, Father Lawless taught for a year at St. Ignatius High School in Chicago. "I had trouble with them," he recalls about the students in his Latin class, "and



Early Jesuits paddled canoes in the U.P., but Father Lawless took the ferry so often that he got a fishing pole to pass the time waiting for it. "I don't remember catching anything," he says.

flunked half of them." At the semester's end, the principal replaced Father Lawless with another teacher — who passed all the students — and moved Father to a math class.

When his provincial superior asked if he was interested in Native American ministry, he answered, "No, but I'll get interested," and was glad for the change in assignments.

So, in 1946 he went to the U.P. where he had helped build St. Isaac Jogues Church in Sault Ste. Marie as a seminarian. Serving more than a dozen missions across the U.P. — some aided by Extension — Father

miles in a weekend in his car, which he replaced every three years. "A lot of cars go 100,000 miles, but I figured I want to be sure to get from one place to the other."

Totally dedicated to the people he knew were waiting for him, he was determined to reach his missions

In 1967, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Church in Bay Mills burned to the ground. The next year Extension sent a grant to help Father Lawless, here standing in the snow-covered rubble of the mission, rebuild the church with classrooms for religious education.



Photo courtesy of Father John Longbucco

For the greater glory of God

Despite near-extinction in the late 1700s, the Society of Jesus now numbers 23,466 members worldwide, making it the largest men's religious community in the Church.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish nobleman, left the military to found the Society in 1534. The congregation experienced immediate and tremendous growth. Saint Ignatius envisioned a companionship of men who would go anywhere, do any work for the Church, putting into action the motto: "All for the greater glory of God." The Society adopted the symbol **ISHS**, the first three letters of the name Jesus in Greek.

By the mid-18th century, its size, prestige and scholarly status had aroused jealousy in political and religious circles. The Jesuits survived expulsion from several countries and a papal brief of suppression — revoked in 1814 — to continue widespread missionary work, education and scholarship.

Jesuit missionary work in the United States began in 1566 with a short-lived foundation on the south-

eastern seaboard between Florida and Virginia. Father Pedro Martínez, tomahawked within a few weeks of landing, became the first Jesuit martyr in the U.S.

French Jesuits in Canada—including Saint Isaac Jogues and 21 other martyrs—extended evangelization efforts into New York and down the Mississippi River. The Church celebrates the feastday of eight of these, commonly referred to as the North American Martyrs, on October 19.

Many other Jesuits are renowned for their pioneering evangelization in other parts of the country: Father Pierre DeSmet in the Northwest, Father Jacques Marquette in the Midwest and Father Eusebio Kino in the Southwest.

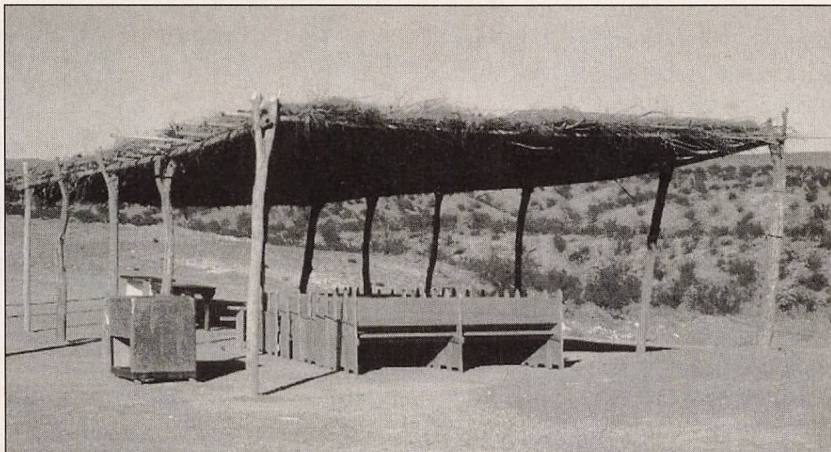
Represented in all 50 states, current Jesuit membership in this country stands at 4,358. Through the years, Extension has supported the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and Jesuit evangelization and pastoral work among Native peoples, including missions in Alaska, the Caroline-Marshall Islands, South Dakota, Montana and Puerto Rico.

Lawless discovered the endurance required of a circuit-riding priest. In the eastern half of the peninsula, he covered distances as far as St. Ignace to the south, Sault Ste. Marie to the north and Drummond Island to the east (see map).

While his predecessors traveled by horseback, canoes and snowshoes, Father drove as much as 200

despite sub-zero temperatures and blinding blizzards. "I usually got where I was going," he allows.

Others speak more emphatically about the priest's faithfulness. "Many times it would be very bad and snowing, but he'd be there," says Pearl Menard, who lives with her husband Alvin about nine miles from Sacred Heart Church on Sugar



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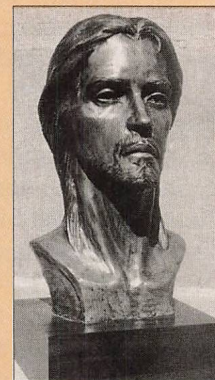
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Every year Extension presents the Lumen Christi Award to a person or group who exemplifies the "Light of Christ" through missionary service to the poor and unchurched in the U.S.

The award includes an engraved plaque and \$2,500 to the recipient and a bronze bust of Christ and \$25,000 to the nominating bishop for evangelization in his diocese.

Island. "And we knew he'd be there, so we always tried to get there, too. Sometimes it was just Al, myself and Father Joe."

Menard's mother, living at Payment on the northeast corner of the island, was homebound for four years. Bertha McCoy would wait at the window every First Friday for Father to bring the Eucharist.

Sometimes when winter storms blasted the island or in spring when the roads broke up, Menard told her mother not to expect Father Lawless. However, the elderly woman insisted that he would come. Without fail, they soon saw the priest trudging up the road in his snowshoes.

Garnett Baumler remembers the time Father Lawless visited her 19-year-old friend Mary Eavou as she lay dying of cancer in a Sault Ste. Marie hospital. The girl asked for Father in the middle of the night once, and he drove 25 miles to the hospital and set up a make-shift altar on the bedside table.

"This was one of the most beauti-

ful experiences of my life," Baumler says. "I'm sure he was in bed, but it was nothing for him to come out and say Mass at midnight."

THE SHIRT OFF HIS BACK

A man able to get along with very little, Father Lawless took only \$10 from each Sunday collection for his personal use. He lived the life of a nomad, never residing for long in one place, Bishop Garland says. When he stayed at the missions on Sugar Island, he slept in the sacristy, keeping warm with two sleeping bags and by throwing sticks on the wood stove fire all night.

While he celebrated Mass in churches on Sundays, he spent the rest of the week saying home Masses for people who lived too far to reach church. On his visits, he frequently found children who had not been baptized and prepared them for the sacrament.

Doors were always open to the priest, who never lacked for a dinner invitation. "He's so humble," says Clifford Baumler, who played cribbage with Father Lawless many evenings. "He'd say, 'Put another cup of water in the soup, and I'll be over.'"

Father Lawless' indifference to possessions is legendary. Though the details may change from person to person, his parishioners love to tell one famous story: A man saw holes in the bottoms of the missionary's shoes as Father Lawless was kneeling in church one day. The man gave Father a new pair of shoes, but soon they appeared on the feet of a poor Indian, and Father went back to his old ones.

"You couldn't give him anything," agrees Menard. Whatever gift he would receive — a belt, sweater or



Photo by Richard Balluck

Chippewa elders are heartened to see their young people reclaiming the Native culture, which was almost lost in the early part of the century.

coat — he always thought there was someone else who could use it more.

"I admired him from the time I was in the seminary," says Father Ted Brodeur, ordained for the Diocese of Marquette in 1966. "I wanted to imitate him and his love for the poor. He was so concerned with social justice, especially justice for the poor. He would give them the shirt off his back."

His sense of generosity knew no bounds. Even when he should have been thinking of himself, he would think of others first. "He sometimes went a little overboard," recalls Sister Mary Ann White, IBVM, who worked with Father for 17 years.



Father clears a path to church with Sister Mary Ann White, IBVM, a friend and co-worker for more than a decade.

Photo courtesy of Sister Mary Ann White, IBVM

For instance, near the end of his ministry in the U.P., he received a beautiful homemade jacket from the Chippewa people. "Isn't this a nice jacket?" he asked Sister Mary Ann, adding that he was going to give away his winter coat because he had this new jacket. "You can't do that!" his friend exclaimed. "That's a winter coat. This is a jacket!"

Even though Sister encouraged him to look out for his own needs, his example of simplicity and frugality touched her, too, she says. "He helped me to simplify my life."

WALKING IN HIS SHOES

There will never be anyone who could walk in Father's shoes, one person said at a retirement dinner for Father Lawless in 1993. Not true, said the next speaker. "Many people are walking around in Father Joe's shoes!"

Everything he gave away came from the heart. A man of deep faith, Father Lawless spends a half-hour nearly every day meditating on verses from the First Letter of John or his favorite Native American prayer. "O Great Spirit—He's our God, too," Father interjects, "whose voice I hear in the winds and whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me." He pauses to say how much he likes the last part of the prayer: "Make me ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes so when life



Would you commute 400 miles a day?

Father Cyril Hunkler does. Each weekend, he travels over treacherous mountain roads in western Montana to serve four missions. He is the only priest in a county twice the size of Rhode Island.

"Sometimes, the drawbacks seem insurmountable," he says. However, he knows that with the help of Extension's Mission Partners he can overcome the obstacles.

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fades as the fading sunset, my spirit may come to you without shame."

"I remember him as a very gentle confessor," says Father Brodeur, pastor of the Holy Name of Mary Church in Sault Ste. Marie. "He was my confessor, and I was always touched by his humility."

One Native American from Sugar Island, who only came to Mass once or twice a year, would go up to Father Lawless to receive Communion, Father Brodeur recalls. The man would ask for absolution "right there on the spot." Father Lawless, who reached out to people on the fringes in a special way, would ask if the man was sorry for his sins, absolve him and then give him Holy Communion, says Father Brodeur. "He opened the gates of mercy as wide as he could for people."

PASSING ON THE FAITH

Father Lawless did much to pass the Faith on to the next generation by establishing summer religious education programs and driving Native American children to Catholic schools and youth camps. Like the sacraments, catechetics was a priority for Father Lawless.

People still remember Father buying clothes and supplies and seeking donations for scholarships so desperately poor Indian children could go to school. In Hannahville, he picked kids up and took them to Escanaba 15 miles away. Otherwise, "they wouldn't have gotten to Catholic schools," he says.

Nothing was too much for Father Lawless if he thought it would help people understand how much God cares for them. He would think nothing of taking 15 to 20 children out by bus for swimming and ice cream. He taught teens how to square dance and joined them in roasting marshmallows.

"Just like Jesus was often surrounded by children, Father Lawless gathered the local youth around him," says Bishop Garland. "They learned about the Lord's concern for them through Father Joe's presence."

Father Lawless, who loves people and loves being with them, seemed



Father greets people at Sugar Island's Sacred Heart Church.

fondly. "They loved to see him coming. He was like a grandfather to them and would reprimand them if they needed it."

"All I can say about Father Joe is that he is a very, very gentle and caring man," says Mary Murray, a 91-year-old Chippewa native of Sugar Island who now lives at *Nokomis Mishomis* (Ojibwa for "Grandma and Grandpa"), an Indian retirement center in Sault Ste. Marie. "He loved these Indian people."

Father Lawless sent Murray's daughter \$10 a month to help her through nursing school. He also would come every Wednesday to Murray's retirement home for Mass and lunch with the residents. "And if anyone didn't come to Mass, he went looking for them to bring them Holy Communion."

'GOOD HEART'

If he has any regrets, Father wishes he could have done more to help the Chippewa preserve their cultural heritage, much of which had been lost by the time he first arrived.

Photo courtesy of Father Joe Lawless



Father Lawless baptizes a great-grandchild of Pearl and Alvin Menard in Payment. This priest exudes simplicity and has a warm and welcoming style of celebrating liturgy. "We are called to do everything we can to be like Jesus," he says.

Father incorporated Native traditions into his liturgies, such as replacing incense with tobacco, long used by the Indians to thank God for His blessings.

"I get kind of a boost out of helping people," Father says with a slow smile. "There's an old man here—in his 90s—I bring his soup over to the table," Father Lawless says, referring to a priest at Colombiere Center, a Jesuit retirement home just outside Detroit where he now resides.

Even in retirement, he says Mass at two nursing homes and brings Holy Communion to his Jesuit brothers who are too ill to be at Mass.

During Father's last years in the Upper Peninsula, Pearl Menard sometimes thought the missionary looked overly tired and would urge him to get some rest. He would look at her and calmly say, "I'll rest a long time one of these days."

When he finally does reach that rest, the man who taught children

Photo by Richard Balluck



In his last year in the U.P., Father celebrated his golden jubilee as a priest.

the Faith, braved blizzards to bring Communion to the sick and gave away his own shoes will stand humbly in front of his Lord.

And perhaps God will smile on His faithful servant and choose to call him *Nish-Ish In-Odeh*, the name meaning "Good Heart" given him by the Chippewa people he served for 46 years.

A New Catechism for a New Generation

By Pete Kelly

In the small Yukon River town of St. Marys, Alaska, the mostly Yup'ik Eskimo population must struggle to survive. Nearly 400 miles west of Anchorage, jobs are hard to come by—even during the short summers, when seasonal fishing and construction projects provide more work. Supplies from the outside world come sparingly by plane and boat.

The Church of the Nativity Parish, too, must work just as hard to make ends meet. The sprawling parish numbers about 300 Catholics in 18 remote villages in the wilderness along Alaska's west coast.

In a state that has just three Catholic grade schools, this mission

parish cannot afford a resident priest, not to mention a religious education director. Parishioners such as Lily Afscan, a longtime resident, fill the gap by teaching catechism. Three or four nights a week, in cramped quarters adjacent to the church, Afscan and the other volunteers teach the Faith to nearly 125 first-through-twelfth graders.

In the 49th State, Native oral traditions have long been used to explain the Catholic Faith to the Yup'iks, Afscan says. Unfortunately, the stories that helped God's Word reach the people are slowly being forgotten.

"We have to have something because we're losing the oral history both of the

Church and our Native stories," she says.

The waiting is over

Afscan, a Yup'ik mother of five who has been teaching catechism classes for nearly 30 years, sees hope with the release of the long-awaited "Catechism of the Catholic Church."

The 800-page document, commissioned by Pope John Paul II in 1985, is the first complete compendium of Catholic teachings in four centuries. The new universal catechism, hailed by the Holy Father as "God's gift to the Church," is seen by many religious educators in Mission America as a big step toward bridging gaps in faith instruction in



Photo by John Holmstrom