

N.A.P.P.



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Flying Medical Service: ‘Grounded or not, we still serve the best we can’

Editor’s note: Fr. Pat Patten of [Flying Medical Service](#) (FMS) sent an update from Tanzania in January. FMS is a nonprofit, volunteer organization that provides health care in remote areas. It offers medical transportation for people throughout Tanzania regardless of religious affiliation, ethnic background or ability to pay. NAPP is a financial supporter of FMS.

January 11, 2024

Hope you had a happy Christmas and a good beginning of the new year.

Here, not so happy. Flying Medical Service has been grounded now for 18 months for reasons not at all clear to us. It looks more and more like a political issue, as you can probably gather from the [MISA newsletters](#) I sent.

Our airplane and crew are airworthy and current and ready to go at a moment’s notice, but unfortunately even lifesaving flights are not allowed. Like so many places in the world, people are left to die unnecessarily. It hurts all over. But it



This was the scene in previous years as people lined up for medical care at a remote landing strip in Tanzania.

hurts more when it happens so close to home.

Tanzania has been home for me for the better part of 50 years. I’m 75 and started working here before I became a priest. So, grounded or not, we all still try to serve the best we can.

Last night, for example, a distraught Maasai woman called at the door. Her 13-year-old daughter had just been bitten by a red spitting cobra. The girl was unconscious. Richard, our 25-year-old Tanzanian pilot, drove her to the only place in Tanzania where I know they carry

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President’s column

Lent is a time for reorientation to get the shiny side up

By Fr. Phil Gibbs
President

Dear Priest Pilots, Associates and Friends,

We are all familiar with the phrase, “Keep the shiny side up and the dirty side down.” It is in reference to the correct orientation of our minds as well as our airworthy machines for safe flying. God forbid we ever find ourselves in the predicament of flying inverted or upside down! But it does happen on occasion and when it does, we need to apply the correct procedures of “push and roll.”



Isn’t it interesting that on Ash Wednesday we seem to, at least in appearance, want to keep the dirty side up and the shiny side down regarding the mark of ashes on our foreheads throughout the day?

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Fr. John Wolesky reflects on his service in the Civil Air Patrol

By Katie Hanel
The Register (Diocese of Salina, Kansas)

While Fr. John Wolesky never served in the military, he was part of something special, other than the priesthood that is. For 15 years, Fr. Wolesky was a part of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP).

CAP serves as the official civilian auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force. It was formed during the earliest days of



World War II, on December 1, 1941, to mobilize the nation's civilian aviation resources for national defense service. It is an organization of citizen airmen who are committed to serving America.

Fr. Wolesky's involvement began in 1993. But his love of planes began long before that.

"I was always a tinkerer," Fr. Wolesky said. "I loved everything that ran and worked on a lot of different machines."

That fascination with machines attracted him to air-

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"Remember you are dust and unto dust you shall return." This is the phrase that we either say or receive when our foreheads are marked with ashes in the sign of the cross. We seem to be rather intentionally "inverted" on that day as we show the "dirty side."

The sign of the cross, these ashes, those words inform us that today is the beginning of a liturgical season which is a time of conversion, a time when we intentionally strive to right the ship of our spiritual lives. Lent is a time of reorientation from the dirty side up to the shiny side up. This season of Lent confronts us with the darkness of our sinfulness and prepares us to embrace the glory and grace of the Easter light when we are, once again, in straight and level flight.

This movement of faith toward reorientation must also affect the regular movement of our lives. On Ash Wednesday we intentionally show the dirty side — our sinfulness. Throughout Lent, we then begin to offer the corrective procedures. We push and roll. We slow down, deny ourselves, give of ourselves, go to confession, and pray with more conviction. The practice of fasting, giving alms and praying are considered to be a conditioning for our souls to more deeply appreciate the promises of Christ.

The recognition that we are sinful people is a universal concept. All religions teach that when we have sinned, we are to reconcile with God and with one another as part of the daily living out of our religion. Each religion sets aside a special time to focus on reconciliation with God and others.

The Jewish people have Yom Kippur after 10 days of repentance. It is a day of atonement when they have reflected on the past year and make amends for the sins they have committed. The Muslims keep the month of Ramadan during which they fast from sunrise to sunset in atonement for sins. The Hindu pilgrims bathe in the Ganges River hoping to wash away

their sins during a religious festival that occurs once every 12 years.

We are at the beginning of our own special time so that we may review our lives, focus on what might be keeping us from a deeper relationship with God and undergo the necessary reformation needed in our lives. Let us make sure

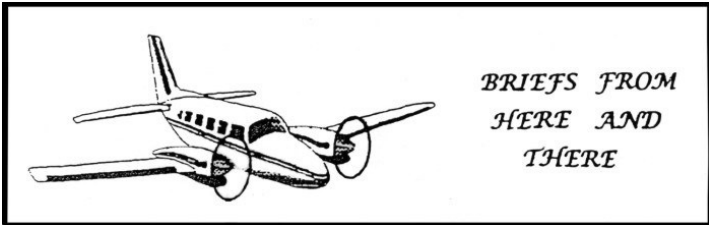
that the ashes are not an empty sign but a sign of our internal conversion of heart.

The sign of the cross that is placed upon our foreheads is a reminder to us that we live in and under the cross which has both its dirty and shiny side. It also reminds us of the one, Jesus the Christ, who conquered the cross. We receive this sign with humility aware of the few times Jesus fell under its weight but also aware of the many times we have fallen and gotten inverted or upside down in our lives. It is in Jesus that we rely for help. Let us fast, pray and give alms to the poor. Let us do this for the sake of reorientation and to make things right side up with the Lord once again.

As we move from winter into spring, from darkness to light, from death to life, from the dirty side down to the shiny side up, so we move in hope and grace from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. Blessings to all of you.

This season of Lent confronts us with the darkness of our sinfulness and prepares us to embrace the glory and grace of the Easter light when we are, once again, in straight and level flight.





also proud of our 2-month-old first granddaughter in Sanford, Florida.”

Priest pilot ascends to membership in the UFOs

Fr. Bill Menzel of Wisconsin Rapids included this note in a recent message to family and friends:



“I’m still flying! I belong to the UFOs — the [United Flying Octogenarians](#), open to any person who has piloted a plane after their 80th birthday. We have more than 1,000 members.”

From the archives: In 2018, Fr. Bill received the [Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award](#), which is given by the FAA to those who have flown safely for at least 50 years. ([June 2018](#) newsletter)

Reminder to pay your dues: The new dues year (fiscal 2024) began July 1, 2023, so please be attentive to paying your \$25 dues. NAPP relies on the honor system to renew your membership; we don’t issue invoices. [Thanks to the 36 members who already paid for fiscal 2024 or beyond.](#) **See the dues form on Page 5.** **NOTE:** Members at the 2023 annual meeting voted to increase the dues to \$30, effective July 1, 2024.

Obituary planning: Members who are making advance funeral arrangements are encouraged to include NAPP in the list to be notified by the family or funeral director. Email: napp.editor@gmail.com.

IRA gift honors the Hemann brothers

Barry and Nancy Brown of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, recently gave the National Association of Priest Pilots a \$1,000 donation in memory of the Hemann brothers — Mel, John and Ev. The gift was in the form of a charitable distribution from Barry’s Individual Retirement Account. We are most grateful for this special gift that honors these three beloved priest pilots who devoted so much of their lives to leading and sustaining NAPP.



Nancy (Johnson) Brown was Fr. Mel’s dedicated co-editor and she designed the masthead we still use on the cover of each newsletter. Barry is a retired corporate pilot and currently works part time as a flight instructor. Read more about them on pages 6-7 of the [December 2020](#) newsletter.

On a family note, Barry writes: “We have 13- and 16-year-old grandsons here in Cedar Rapids who attend Regis Middle School and Xavier High School and are

A Japanese aviator

By Michael Einarsen

Being a Catholic and living my faith with a sense of adventure has always been a rich experience for me. Rich in the sense that I have met many people with very special vocations that they have chosen.



Throughout my life, it has always been these people, usually Catholic priests, sisters and brothers, but not always. Often there have been the exceptional lay people with very unique vocations. Here is one such story:

The missionary pilot: I was in Japan for business. After Mass one day in Osaka, I was approached by a woman named Keiko. She was Japanese and had been a convert to Catholicism. She told me she had experience working with those who were blind and that she was now a pilot, specifically a missionary pilot. Her vocation had become flying the Catholic missionaries

throughout Southeast Asia. Wow, I thought.

The crash in Siam: She went on to say that her plane had crashed in Siam. She proceeded to ask me if I had ever heard of Gilbert, Arizona. Being a Chicago boy, I had not. She continued. “I am going to Gilbert, Arizona, to learn how to repair aircraft so that if I crash again, I can repair the plane.” Wow again, I thought. What a great attitude. I knew this was an encounter I would not forget.

Gilbert, Arizona: The years went by. My wife and I found ourselves and family living in Gilbert, Arizona. “What a coincidence,” I thought after I recalled our meeting in Japan. Now that we were settled at our new home, I looked up Keiko’s email and wrote. She replied she was still in fact in Arizona working for an aircraft company.

“What parish do you go to?” I asked. She replied, “St. Mary’s in Chandler.” I replied, “Hey, we go there but I

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the appropriate snake anti-venom. She has a good chance of pulling through there. But without the help from the right place and the right person, she likely would have died in about two hours.

Rabid dog bites are common. We carry the anti-rabies vaccine and still use about 25 vials a month. Car accidents happen locally daily. We often serve as a ground ambulance with our small Suzuki cars.

There are many cases of obstructed labor. It is a regular occurrence here for 13- and 14-year-olds to deliver — or try to — with an insufficiently developed pelvic structure.

One young woman delivered quite normally on the front seat of my car as I was trying to drive her to the hospital. A short, five-minute stop. Healthy baby in arms. We continued on to the hospital anyway. The nurse said: “Happy new year. Congratulations! What do you want us to do here? The mother and baby look fine. Take them home.” So I did.

And the new year goes and grows. We keep trying to fly. We keep pushing. We keep hoping. Will let you know when we’re airborne again.

Pat and Crew

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have not seen you.” She replied that she was going to the Spanish Mass to learn Spanish for an upcoming mission flight in Mexico. I wrote, “I’ll meet you at the next Spanish Mass there,” and so we did, after all those years.

Vocation found: Keiko heard God’s call. She found her vocation and said “Yes.” A life lived as a vocation is an adventurous and holy way to live. I have often thought, how many people has she inspired? How

NAPP \$2,000 grant will help pay for ongoing aviation expenses

Editor’s note: The National Association of Priest Pilots sent a \$2,000 grant to Flying Medical Service in January. Here is the letter that accompanied the check:

Members of the National Association of Priest Pilots, at their September 2023 annual meeting, voted to provide a \$2,000 grant to Flying Medical Service, payable in 2024, for aviation-related expenses in Arusha, Tanzania. NAPP is pleased to continue this tradition to support the work of Fr. Pat Patten, who is one of our members. (Even though FMS currently is grounded by the Tanzanian government, we hope this grant will help pay for ongoing aviation-related expenses such as maintenance, insurance and GPS subscriptions.)

For the second consecutive year, this is the Hemann Brothers Grant from NAPP. It is named for three deceased priests, Mel, John and Ev Hemann, who were longtime leaders of NAPP.

Don Danko, treasurer of FMS, sent the following thank-you note:

An abundance of thanks for NAPP’s \$2,000 Hemann Brothers Grant to the Flying Medical Service.

Although we currently are grounded, we very much appreciate this grant to help pay for ongoing aviation-related expenses that we continue to incur. We are grateful for NAPP’s continued support of Fr. Pat Patten’s life-giving mission in Arusha, Tanzania. We are hopeful that the Tanzanian government will soon allow us to continue our flights bringing medical care to dozens of remote areas in a large part of north-central Tanzania.

Warm greetings to all from Pat.



Happier days: Pat received a special painting from his staff for his birthday in 2018, and a group photo of the event was shared on social media. In the [February 2019](#) NAPP newsletter, Pat tells the story behind the painting.

many people realize that each has a call, most especially one that begins at baptism.

Are you listening? Are you searching for your vocation? Are you searching for a path to holiness and adventure? Come and visit us (with a pilot’s license or not) at: MissionaryServantVocations.org.

Michael Einarsen is assistant director for vocations for the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity, a congregation of priests, sisters, brothers, consecrated lay people and laity.

Hotel reservations now open for convention in Texas

Mark your calendars for the 2024 NAPP Convention in Fredericksburg, Texas. Arrivals will be Monday, September 16, with convention activities on Tuesday and Wednesday and departures on Thursday, September 19.

Fr. Phil Gibbs, NAPP president, has been busy working on plans for our gathering, with assistance from his brother and sister-in-law who live in Texas.

Lodging and convention headquarters will be at the [Inn on Barons Creek](#), a boutique hotel at 308 S. Washington St. (We originally were hoping to stay at the Hangar Hotel, but it is booked during our intended stay.)

During our stay, enjoy all the Hill Country of Texas has to offer in a relaxing, small-town atmosphere. The Inn on Barons Creek is conveniently located two blocks from historic Main Street, within walking distance to dining, shopping and other attractions. Picturesque Barons Creek flows through the back of the property and provides a tranquil and serene setting.



The hotel has 90 luxuriously furnished two-room guest suites. Our convention room rate is \$139 per night, plus 6% state tax and 7% local tax, for a total of \$157.07 per night.

A deluxe hot breakfast bar is included each morning. There is complimentary wireless internet service throughout the hotel and a heated outdoor pool.

NAPP is renting the Van der Stucken room from 4 p.m. Monday through 11 a.m. Thursday for hospitality and meeting functions.

Important notes from the hotel:

- Individuals are responsible for making and guaranteeing their own reservation from the NAPP block of 20 rooms.
- To receive the group rate, call the hotel — **830-990-9202** — and make your reservation before



August 16. Provide your arrival date (September 16) and request a room from the NAPP block.

- The group rate is not available online; the hotel will not honor the group rate for reservations made online.

Fr. Phil and the convention team look forward to welcoming you to Texas for an enjoyable convention. Stay tuned for details on activities and dining plans.

General aviation arrivals will be at [Gillespie County Airport \(T82\)](#), three miles southwest of downtown Fredericksburg. It has a 5,000-foot runway. Fuel services provided by [Fredericksburg FBO](#).



To learn more about the area, check out the [Fredericksburg Convention & Visitor Bureau](#).

2024 NAPP Dues – U.S. \$25.00

Fiscal year began July 1, 2023

Use this form or use PayPal (go to priestpilots.org and click **Pay Now**).

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____

STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

EMAIL: _____

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Member category: Charter Regular Associate

Make check payable to NAPP and mail to: Tom Enwright, Treasurer, 419 Chestnut St., Sauk City, WI 53583

In addition to the \$25 annual dues, we encourage members to make a separate donation to the **NAPP Missionary Gift Fund**, which will be used to support the organization's charitable grants. Donations can be sent to the same address or you can use PayPal. Go to priestpilots.org and click on the **Donate** button.



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planes. But he learned to fly for practical reasons.

“I hate driving,” he said.

Fr. Wolesky grew up in Minnesota. He came to serve the Diocese of Salina in 1967, and he knew he wouldn’t be able to make the long drive home from Kansas to Minnesota to see his family. So, he found himself an instructor, bought a plane and learned how to fly.

“It took me a little longer to learn how to fly since I was older. But I flew for 50 years,” he said.

One day in 1993, while at the Salina airport, Fr. Wolesky was working on his airplane and stopped for a coffee break when he noticed a bunch of older guys in military fatigues. He walked over to visit with them and learned they were from all over Kansas and were conducting a practice search and rescue. This was his first encounter with CAP.

Fr. Wolesky told them he was a Catholic priest who could also fly airplanes, and they asked him to be their chaplain.

“All the trainings were on the weekends, so I couldn’t attend because of Mass and my duties as hospital chaplain. But I went to what I could and did some flying for them,” he said.

“It was a really fun group. I learned a lot about flying, and they learned about religion.”

The group regularly met on Mondays for meetings, and Fr. Wolesky compares the meetings to his growing-up years and his involvement with Boy Scouts. On the weekends, the group would work with middle school and high school aged children, training them on how to properly use radios, responding to transmissions as well as practice search and rescue flights. The kids who participated in the program were then able to bypass certain training programs if they chose to join the Air Force. Fr. Wolesky did a little flying for them. He used his own airplane, and they gave him a little gas money in exchange. But one of the best things about his involvement with CAP was the camaraderie.

“Once the youngsters were gone, us guys and gals would go to Tucson’s, a good eating place in south Salina,” he said. “We’d go there and sit around and have 99-cent beer. We’d sit around to talk. At first, I didn’t have a whole lot to share. Then when I listened to them, they were remembering the camaraderie of military and the memories of basic. And I realized I

had six years of basic training ... in the seminary. We had uniforms and schedules and had to be at a certain place at a certain time. It was a great parallel between seminary and military. We were all taught discipline.”

Fr. Wolesky was with CAP for 15 years, even serving as state chaplain at one point, and he has a lot of memories of his time.

He laughs as he shares one memory when he was called to search for the source of an emergency transmission. “I flew with a college kid. There was an

emergency transmission. No one knew the source, but it was headed west,” he said. “We found it near Wilson and then lost it again. By that time, we realized it was on the interstate. We chased it all the way to the Colorado border before we got out of range and had to

return. The Colorado Highway Patrol picked up the chase, and it turned out to be a balloon in the back of a semi trailer that had been bumped and was sending out the transmission.”

Searching for transmissions happened fairly frequently, “but it was usually never serious.”

Another group Fr. Wolesky was involved with was the National Association of Priest Pilots (NAPP). He, along with Fr. Alvin Werth and the late Fr. Merlin Kieffer flew to many of the meetings, trading off whose plane they would fly.

“Fr. Alvin was the president for a while, and I was the treasurer at one point,” he said.

“This group of flying priests was like belonging to another diocese. We’d talk flying, but we talked about our parishes. Some were bishops, some were religious, some were from overseas.”

While Fr. Wolesky no longer has his own airplane, and he doesn’t fly as much — he does still fly.

“On a nice day when the weather is good, I’ll go fly for a short distance or so,” he said.

While he doesn’t fly like he used to, Fr. Wolesky remains grateful for the friendships and experience he gained from his time in both the CAP and NAPP.

(This article from the [November 24, 2023, edition](#) is reprinted with permission of the Diocese of Salina.)



From the archives: Fr. Wolesky (left) was recognized by the FAA for 50 years of safe flying. ([February 2018](#))

On a snowy winter's day, I found a treasure ...

By Patrick J. McDonald, CFI-I, ATP

However, it wasn't a treasure hidden in a field, as in the Gospel parable. The treasure was excavated from an overloaded file cabinet, where I keep a collection of tattered and fading flight logs — dating back to 1966, as I began training for a private pilot license.



What prompted this treasure hunt? It was Tom Enwright's email, asking NAPP members to report anything that promised to break up the winter boredom and offer something fresh for the newsletter, while many are mercilessly assaulted with record snows and powerful winds that paralyzed the nation and grounded flights nationwide.

While staying warm and cozy, feeling the howling wind occasionally shake my house, I leafed through my treasures and relived a large number of flight experiences in every season under the sun in diverse destinations in North America, including 20 carefree summertime flights to the interior of Alaska, Canada and the Caribbean.

My assessment of these adventures was generally pleasant, since my passengers and I never experienced so much as a close call. I easily moved to a state of gratitude to my Creator for such a long career in aviation and I hold a positive outlook for even more, once the seasons change.

In an effort to ferret out something good about January, I thumbed backward in time until I found the date of January 25, 1983. The logbook entry looked austere, but the quick thawing of pleasant memories created a warm internal environment and offers some material for our readers:

Day 1 logbook entry: January 25, 1983; IFR to Steamboat Springs, Colorado

Memories that emerged:

I picked up three friends in Omaha and opened an IFR flight plan to Steamboat Springs, Colorado. I was fly-

ing a Cessna Turbo 210 that belonged to a development company, and I was acting as a director of aviation operations. My job was to train, train and train several in-house pilots and keep them current. In turn, I was granted access to several exotic airplanes to use at my leisure. I began to live a myth that exotic aircraft, like the Turbo 210, could go anywhere at any time of year. At that time, the certification standards were more cavalier about flight into known icing conditions. The results of that myth are saved for another story.

I had never flown into Steamboat Springs before, but the weather looked good except for layers of stratus clouds throughout the mountainous areas awaiting me. With the help of Denver Center, I descended through layers of clouds for a visual approach into Steamboat. As I announced to my controller that Steamboat airport was in sight, I saw nothing but snow, snow and more snow and a runway that looked awfully short. I clutched a bit as I noted on the map that it was also designated as *STOLport*. I saw menacingly high banks of snow frame the slippery runway.

The scenario invited me to ask for one last favor from the same Creator who had protected me so often —

As I announced to my controller that Steamboat airport was in sight, I saw nothing but snow, snow and more snow and a runway that looked awfully short.

this time to grant a safe landing. The big flaps on the Centurion and an assuredly slow short-field approach speed brought us to the threshold of the runway, then allowed us to stop rolling without excessive braking. We eased to a stop between snowbanks 10 feet

high. As I turned onto the taxiway. I spotted a new Piper Malibu solidly embedded in a taxiway snowbank: landing gear collapsed, prop bent, and looking cold and forlorn. Once we were secured on the ramp and warming ourselves in the main lounge, I asked the airport manager about the Malibu.

"Four Texans in shirtsleeves," he said. "They ran out of fuel right over the airport and came in hot but made the field. They braked hard and slid right into the snowbank. Caved in the landing gear. Probably ruined a prop and engine and the pilot broke his foot. They seemed happy to get on the ground. We expect a maintenance crew from Denver one of these days to address the mess." He shook his head as he added, "I'm glad I don't have to pay the bill."

More memories: Ski time and fun

The shuttle to the ski area, while we met up with other friends, opened the floodgate of local news and mixed reviews: "Twenty-five below zero last night. Too cold

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to ski this morning. We've decided to scrub all skiing for the day and we're hoping for better conditions tomorrow."

A warm condo, plenty of beer, and rewatching as many John Candy and Chevy Chase comedies as we could stand, calmed our disappointed spirits. So did a lengthy float in the world's largest outdoor hot tub under the stars, while mesmerized by a spectacular night sky that only subzero temperatures can enhance.

Day 2, January 26, 1983:

We tried skiing and were greeted by the merciless January cold. As we prepared our bodies for the frigid assault, the news brought reports of temperatures as low as 42 degrees below zero. To protect ourselves from the threat of frostbite, no bare skin was left exposed. We looked like overstuffed, uncoordinated mummies, trying desperately to stay upright. Fifteen minutes on the ski slope were enough to convince us that a pleasant ski event was off the table for the rest of the day. "Enough," became the common cry of the suffering brotherhood, and the exodus led directly to the world's largest hot tub to deice.

Day 3, January 27, 1983:

We awakened to temperatures in the region ranging from 35 to 70 degrees below zero. By this time, there was no argument: it was time to get airborne once again and take the most direct route back home to the balmy Midwestern temperature of 10 degrees.

I had one problem to solve, however, before the threats of mutiny became severe: How to start our Centurion in a brutally cold environment, not to mention cleaning off the accumulated snow on the airframe.

Fortunately, the FBO sold spots in a heated hangar, but he needed another day to open up the hangar space for us. Apparently, we were not the only flyers pushing to exit the place. We dealt with the pervasive bore-

dom by drinking beer and rerunning John Candy and Chevy Chase comedies.

Day 4: January 28, 1983; IFR to Council Bluffs, Iowa:

It was unbearably cold, but we secured ourselves in the Centurion, then were tugged out of the heated hangar and started the engine like it was a spring day. We awaited our clearance to Council Bluffs, as the



PJ McDonald and the capable Cessna Centurion headed for Steamboat Springs. Left: Oxygen at 15,000 feet.

snow continued to fall. Finally, the clearance came through the Steamboat remote frequency, and we were airborne as the visibility dropped to marginal.

The departure procedures seemed clear enough. Do a corkscrew climb, while staying within a one-mile radius of the airport until reaching 12,000 feet and contact Denver Center. I scrupulously complied with the clearance, preferring not to brush up against the mountain peaks all around us. I thanked God for prayers answered as we broke out of the gloom and embraced glorious sunshine right at 12,000 feet.

Denver Center confirmed our position and cleared us to 15,000 feet for a direct route to CBF.

This put us high above the clouds and the spectacle below

was at a storybook level — snow-capped peaks poking through the midlevel blanket of layered clouds to the horizon. We soon left all clouds behind as the mountains changed to the Central Plains and the visibility stretched out to 100 miles. The tail winds were aggressive, and our flight computer told us we'd be in the balmy Midwest in three carefree hours.

For a pilot, it doesn't get any better than this: stable air, all aircraft systems working smoothly, incredible groundspeed, fair weather to our destination and a pleasant working relationship with controllers as we crossed the Nebraska border. All seemed at peace with my world for the first time in four days.

Then a shaky voice, filtered through an oxygen mask from a rear passenger, announces: "PJ, I have to go to the bathroom." It was from my beloved brother, John.

"John," I say, "we're at 15,000 feet. To get to the nearest bathroom, I'll have to request a clearance to some potty stop 50 miles ahead of us. It'll take more

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Alaska and NAPP: Mode of aviation travel is changing as funding is tight

By Tom Enwright

The importance of air travel in the Diocese of Fairbanks in Alaska cannot be underestimated. The diocese currently relies on commercial carriers for its priests and other pastoral ministers to reach remote communities across its 409,000 square miles of territory.

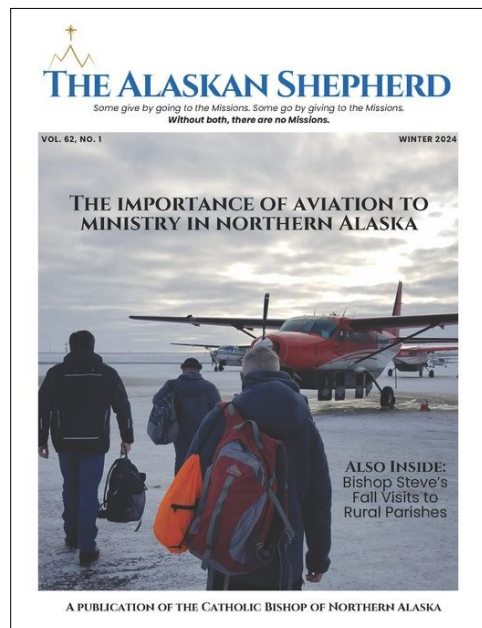
Years ago, it used to be diocesan-operated aircraft that flew to the distant reaches of the diocese.

[The Alaskan Shepherd](#), a diocesan publication, devoted its winter 2024

edition to the importance of aviation to ministry in northern Alaska.

In past years, NAPP provided financial support for diocesan air travel expenses, most recently when the diocese operated its own single-engine Cessna 182 until 2020. However, at the September 2023 annual meeting, members voted to issue only one grant in 2024, to Flying Medical Service in Tanzania, instead of supporting both FMS and Fairbanks. The difficult decision was based on declining

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Fr. Stan Jaszek, far left, boards a commercial flight to one of his churches in western Alaska.

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time to execute that, get restarted, climb back to altitude and proceed on, than to proceed on to Council Bluffs as scheduled. Hang on. Staying on course is the best option available.”

“I’ll try,” was the only answer.

What began as a casual timetable and optimistic outlook now became seriously compromised. I kept reassuring John that we’ll get there. He kept asking, “How much longer?” I kept saying, “Hang in there, brother,” and counted down the minutes to destination for him — 40, 30, 29, 25.

The final descent clearance came at about the 20-minute mark from home base, then the controller said he’d have to keep us at a high altitude until the traffic into Omaha clears. All I heard from the back seat was a slight “oh no.”

The good news is that we made the potty stop with no incidents. John was the first passenger out of the airplane and when he walked back to the sunny and warm (10 degrees) ramp area, I congratulated him for his fortitude and patience. The entire event created an atmosphere that all is right with the world.

Thoughts on currency and proficiency:

Working on pilot proficiency is never finished, whatever the season. I did a lot of practical learning by looking up everything available on flying into Steamboat Springs and it was a revelation. Forty years was a long time ago. What was marginal then has shown vast

improvement, with a large assortment of modern IFR approaches, longer and wider runways and improved aids for pilots and their passengers.

I had plenty of time on that cold January day when I began this essay, so I studied every approach in depth, overlaid the approaches on terrain maps and grew quite confident that I could execute a return flight to Steamboat with little anxiety.

History, however, has invited more realistic thinking: the Centurion now belongs to a new owner, and my Piper Arrow doesn’t do very well with long-range and high-altitude flying. So be it.

I suggest that the summit of proficiency is akin to wisdom. Few of us can do what we did with ease 40 years ago and the wise person knows it is better to exercise new options than to push the limits. My treasure hunt brought me to the realization that once in a lifetime is enough.

Patrick J. McDonald, a longtime associate member of NAPP, is a licensed mental health practitioner. He maintains an active practice in Des Moines, Iowa, in partnership with his wife, Claudette.

I suggest that the summit of proficiency is akin to wisdom. Few of us can do what we did with ease 40 years ago and the wise person knows it is better to exercise new options than to push the limits.

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paid membership and a decreased long-term ability to sustain both grants, plus the fact that the diocese no longer owns an aircraft.

(During Fiscal Year 2023 — July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023 — 66 members paid their \$25 dues, resulting in \$1,725 in revenue. Three people paid for two years each. Seven members donated to the NAPP Missionary Gift Fund for a total of \$425. In 2023, NAPP issued two grants of \$1,500 each, which wouldn't be sustainable without additional donations.)

With that as background, it's still valuable for us to appreciate the high cost of air transportation for the Diocese of Fairbanks, and this edition of the diocesan publication offers a blend of historical context and snapshots that illustrate the overall travel challenges.

Here is an excerpt from the main article:

After World War I, the country entered the “golden age” of aviation, and the Church in Alaska was anxious to incorporate flight into missionary work. In 1929, donors helped Bishop Crimont purchase a small, specially customized plane for arctic winter flying.

The “Marquette Missionary” was supposed to have heralded a new technological era in which missionaries could reach their flocks quickly. Instead, the plane tragically crashed a month after it arrived in Alaska, killing the pilot and two priests on board.

The crash had a chilling effect on missionary aviation in Alaska, and it would take another 25 years before Bishop Francis Gleeson began to use planes again to

transport priests between missions. Once reintroduced, air travel became the norm and by 1977, the diocese owned five planes and had nearly a dozen pilot priests. Fairbanks even had its own “flying bishop” in the 1980s, when Bishop Michael Kaniecki flew his own plane to village churches.

Today, the diocese relies on small commercial carriers to get ministers to rural parishes. But while air travel is safer, there are tradeoffs. Flights are often delayed and canceled due to snow, fog and high wind. Weather can ground planes for a few hours or a few days, making it difficult for priests to get to their next parish to celebrate Mass. At times, the delays keep them from anointing a dying parishioner or consoling a grieving family.

In that same edition of *The Alaskan Shepherd*, Bishop Steven J. Maekawa, OP, who was ordained bishop of Fairbanks in October 2023, wrote a journal about his travels to 11 of the diocese's 46 parishes in November and December. It's a fascinating essay.

The NAPP newsletter archives provide more interesting reading about flying in Alaska. This article in the [December 2020](#) edition announces the end of diocesan-operated air travel.

Then there was this gem from [February 2020](#), written by Fr. Jim Falsey: “A Christmas to remember: Priest pilot chronicles the challenges of reaching God's people in Alaska.”

Bishop Kaniecki — the flying bishop mentioned in *The Alaskan Shepherd* — is remembered in the [August 2000](#) newsletter after his death from a heart attack, just a few weeks after attending the NAPP convention in Anchorage. He died on the Feast of the

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Maps from the Diocese of Fairbanks

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Transfiguration while in an Alaskan Eskimo village just before celebrating Mass. He was 65 years old.

Incidentally, that August 2000 edition includes a recap of the July convention in Alaska. It's interesting to page through the newsletter that was edited for decades by Fr. Mel Hemann. I wasn't a member of NAPP back then, but it seems that it was the golden era of the organization. The 2000 convention drew an attendance of 44 people including six charter members. That compares with 14 members who attended the 2023 convention in Pennsylvania.

Age, it seems, is catching up with our organization, but the mission to support aviation-related ministry still is as important as ever, and the camaraderie of attending a convention is something to cherish. And so we continue ...

This fall, Fredericksburg, Texas, will be added to the historical list of [NAPP convention sites](#).

Your financial support of NAPP — through dues and additional donations — will help us continue to provide aviation-related grants for as long as possible. NAPP was chartered in 1964. Sixty years later, it still is a relevant organization. God willing, it will be around for another 60 years.



"It is with paternal satisfaction that the Holy Father views the efforts of the members of the National Association of Priest Pilots to encourage the use of air transportation to obtain ever more abundant spiritual fruits from their sacerdotal ministry and missionary apostolate."

The Vatican, September 29, 1964

Purpose:

1. To promote the use of private aircraft as a practical, safe, and efficient tool of the apostolic work of a priest.
2. To cooperate with other aviation and ecclesiastical groups wherever possible in order to promote aviation in the cause of the Church.
3. To insist on the safe and proficient use of the airplane by its members.
4. To encourage the use of private aircraft as worthy of the talents and dignity of priests.
5. To further the use of aircraft in the missions.

Flyer's Rosary

By night on swift enchanted wings I fly.
Bright stars above become my Rosary.
Each star a lonely prayer which bids me try
To live in faith and hope and charity.
At times I seem to question truth above
And even doubt sublime eternity.
Yet countless stars tell me a Holy Love
Will watch and care for me eternally.
All through the night I prayed my Rosary
On heavenly beads where only angels trod.
How can I ever doubt life's mystery
When first at dawn my humbled soul is awed?
The generous sun gives me so tenderly
Another day—that I may live for God.

—Max Conrad

The final words of an address given by Mr. Conrad at the Charter Banquet, July 15, 1964, in Carrollton, Kentucky



The National Association of Priest Pilots newsletter is published online six times per year (August, October, December, February, April, June). Fiscal year begins July 1. Website: priestpilots.org

Articles, news notes and photos can be sent to Tom Enwright, napp.editor@gmail.com. Deadline for the April edition is March 31.

NAPP Leadership Team

President: Fr. Phil Gibbs

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2023 Year in Review



FEBRUARY 2023

President's column: Reflecting on Benedict XVI who has "Gone West" (by Fr. Phil Gibbs)
2023 NAPP convention will be in the Poconos
Msgr. Ivan Vap, who co-hosted 1965 convention, dies at age 94

Who is the patron saint of pilots?

Flyer's Rosary

Longing for peace in Tanzania: Dry weather, political intimidation bring dire consequences (by Fr. Pat Patten)

Countdown to darkness: Calculating the risk of bush flying (by Jack Rejman)

"Air Born Again" author, Deacon Dennis Kudlak, shares life's joys and turbulence (by Tom Enwright)

Briefs:

- Patrick J. McDonald is published again in Midwest Flyer
- George Gratton to present forum at SUN 'n FUN
- Bishop Kettler of St. Cloud retires
- Bishop Capelli of Gizo prepares for retirement

APRIL 2023

President's column: Easter season brings thoughts of the shepherds in our lives (by Fr. Phil Gibbs)

Formation flying, of a sort (by Msgr. William J. King)

Welcome to NAPP's three new members (Fr. Sahaya Paul Sebastian, Nick Chapman, Chris Ransom)

Reservations are open for September gathering in Poconos

It was quite the sight: Lear Jet makes a lasting impression (by Tom Enwright)

From the NAPP archives ... 20 years ago | April 2003 (excerpt from the president's column by Fr. Everett Hemann)

Briefs:

- One more landing ... then tire trouble
- Flying bishop's plane is back in the air
- George Gratton presents at SUN 'n FUN
- Jubilees in 2023

JUNE 2023

President's column: Dad has been a great inspiration in faith and flying (by Fr. Phil Gibbs)

Fr. John Herzog, charter member of NAPP, dies at age 91

"I'm gonna miss you, John" (by Patrick J. McDonald)

From one funeral to another: Lessons in life, faith, humility (by Tom Enwright)

NAPP members celebrate milestone anniversaries (Fr. Albert Ruschman, Msgr. Frank Mouch, Fr. Thomas D. O'Neill)

Hobie's dream of an aviation career is right on course (by Fr. Bill Menzel)

As the years go by, priest pilots keep the stories alive through NAPP (by Fr. George Remm)

Reservations are open for September gathering in Poconos

From the NAPP archives ... 19 years ago | February 2004 (Fr. Everett Hemann recalls an exchange between his brother, Msgr. John Hemann, and an MD-80 pilot)

Chartres, France: A charming getaway destination for UK pilots (by Fr. Peter Geldard)

Book review: "Frozen in Time" (by Jim Knights)

AUGUST 2023

President's column: Memorare sets our hope on flying in so many ways (by Fr. Phil Gibbs)

Lesson learned: 'Good' landing ends 27 feet short of runway (by Fr. Miles Barrett)

Scenes from EAA AirVenture 2023 in Oshkosh
Fr. Gene Murray's album from EAA AirVenture 2023

"The Man Who Flies Alone" (a poem shared by Fr. Gene Murray)

From the NAPP archives ... 15 years ago | August 2008 (Fr. Gene Murray writes about the Jesuit Retreat House in Oshkosh)

Deadline approaching for NAPP convention in the Poconos

NAPP convention sites: 1964-2023

Briefs:

- Fr. Greg McPhee reflects on three spiritual values that sustain his ministry in Bolivia

- Deacon Dennis Kudlak attends installation of new bishop

- Msgr. Frank Mouch moves into senior living facility in Florida

- Bishop Luciano Capelli is granted retirement status

- Fr. Steven Maekawa selected as new bishop of Fairbanks

- Barry and Nancy (Johnson) Brown have a new address in Cedar Rapids

OCTOBER 2023

President's column: Adjust your compass and set your course on Jesus Christ (by Fr. Phil Gibbs)

Fall weather greets NAPP members for 2023 convention in the Poconos

Flying Medical Service is allowed to resume medical flights (by Fr. Pat Patten)

Bush flying in Tanzania has plenty of challenges and rewards (by Jack Rejman)

Death notices: Fr. William J. Winkler, OFM; Fr. Richard Tinney; Fr. Owen F. Shanley

Catholic Aviation Association updates website, offers speakers (by Terry Garrity)

Briefs:

- Christopher Hoffmann is a transitional deacon
- Visiting Teilhard: A pilgrimage of remembrance (by Fr. Allen Corrigan)
- An update on Fr. Paul Baseford (by George Gratton)

DECEMBER 2023

President's column: Spiritual checklist for Advent is similar to making wise piloting decisions ... before it's too late (by Fr. Phil Gibbs)

NAPP 2024 Convention set for Fredericksburg, Texas, in September

What's new at the Catholic Aviation Association? (by Terry Garrity)

Correction on financial report

Briefs:

- The three wise men discussing their upcoming trip!
- Wings of Hope posts update on Flying Medical Service
- Memories of the Twin Beech at the Josephinum
- One more story about Msgr. Frank Mouch
- NAPP has a new member from Texas: Bryan McAlister
- A calendar note from our friends at EAA