



DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS

1316 PEGER ROAD • FAIRBANKS, ALASKA • 99709 • 907-374-9500 • FAX: 907-374-9580

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

23 July 2025

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ:

Our diocese has been profoundly blessed by the presence of international priests and religious who have left the familiarity of their homes and cultures to serve the people of northern Alaska. As many of you know, the process for accepting foreign clergy is a long and arduous process to secure a religious worker (R-1) visa which allows them to serve for up to five years. Current visa rules require that a foreign religious worker leave the United States for one year before applying to return. As you can imagine, this seriously affects our ability to keep priests who wish to continue their ministry beyond five years.

Recently, legislation was introduced in both houses of Congress to remove the one-year departure requirement for religious workers in the country with an approved R-1 and I-360. This is a change for which we have been waiting and hoping! This bill has bipartisan support (from Democrats and Republicans) and is bicameral (the same bill was introduced in both the Senate and House of Representatives) which gives us great hope for final passage. That said, **the more support we can provide, the sooner and more likely it is to pass.** I am asking the faithful of the diocese to consider contacting our senators and representative to support this bill.

Suggested text is provided below though you are free to write your own message of support. You may wish to include how one or more of our missionary priests has positively affected you and your community.

Dear Senator Murkowski, Senator Sullivan, and Representative Begich,

Please support passage of the Religious Workforce Protection Act (S. 1298 and H.R. 2672), a critical measure that would provide relief for religious workers and their employers facing extensive delays in obtaining permanent residency due to a backlog in the EB-4 visa category.

The Catholic Diocese of Fairbanks depends heavily on missionary priests to serve Alaskans across our vast state, ensuring that vital sacramental ministries continue to thrive in even the most remote communities. Several international priests serving in the Diocese of Fairbanks have generously agreed to pursue a green card so they can serve beyond the five years allowed by the Religious Worker (R-1) visa. **These priests will be required to leave the country over the next two years if this bill is not passed. If this happens, 25% of our Catholic parishes in northern Alaska will lose their priests.**

Thank you,
[your name]

In the coming weeks, we will be providing pre-addressed postcards with the statement to all parishes. If you use the postcards, it is important that you ***write your return address, sign the postcard, and affix postage*** before you mail it to our Congressional delegation so that they know you are a constituent.

Here is the contact information for the three Alaska representatives. You can call or email, whichever you prefer.

- Senator Lisa Murkowski
Email: <https://www.murkowski.senate.gov/contact/email>
Phone: 907-456-0233 (Fairbanks), 907-271-3735 (Anchorage), 202-224-6665 (D.C.)
- Senator Dan Sullivan
Email: <https://www.sullivan.senate.gov/contact/email>
Phone: 907-456-0261 (Fairbanks), 907-271-5915 (Anchorage), 202-224-3004 (D.C.)
- Representative Nick Begich
Email: <https://begich.house.gov/contact/email-me>
Phone: 907-251-4560 (Fairbanks), 907-921-6575 (Anchorage), 202-225-5765 (D.C.)

As always, I ask you to continue to pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life here in northern Alaska. While we are extremely grateful for those who have come to serve the faithful of Fairbanks, we must also be responsible for raising up our own workers for the vineyard.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "St. Maekawa" with a flourish at the end.

†Most Reverend Steven J. Maekawa, O.P.
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska
Diocese of Fairbanks

SJM/rdf