

**Following a Month-Long
Field Trip,
World Missions Secretary
Arden Almquist
Declares, 'It Is Time for
the Alaska Church
to Achieve Statehood!'**

Alaska Report

WE THOUGHT you'd shake things up a bit when you went to Alaska, Arden, but we didn't expect you to overdo it!"

Thus commented a friend on welcoming me back to Chicago Monday, April 13, after a month-long trip to Alaska which included a stop-over in Canada for the commencement activities at Covenant Bible Institute. Our trip did coincide with the earthquake that shook Alaska on Good Friday like a rag-doll in a terrier's mouth. We had left Anchorage two days before the Big Shake and were in Unalakleet at the time. I was conversing with Larry and Betty Nilson in their second floor apartment when tremors shook the building, and we realized at once there had been an earthquake.

We viewed the devastation at Anchorage on our way out, and it is awesome to see. The apocalyptic and eschatological passages in the Scriptures seemed newly relevant. The prophecy, "One shall be taken and the other left," came alive in the episodes related about the woman and her husband who dropped into a

crevasse which suddenly opened in the earth and she was hemisected as the earth closed over them, but he escaped with the loss of a leg; and about the doctor and his wife whose two children disappeared before their eyes into a yawning fissure that bisected their home.

One could only marvel at the small loss of life in the presence of so much material destruction and thank God for sparing the population, including our Covenant people, their parsonage, and the new church I had been privileged to dedicate the Sunday before.

I had visited Alaska two and a half years ago in connection with the writing of *Covenant Missions in Alaska*, a history of our mission there prepared for the 75th anniversary. The current visit confirmed many of the impressions gained then but modified others.

I feel that the Covenant Church in Alaska is more truly indigenous than generally realized, although it still receives substantial subsidies for its

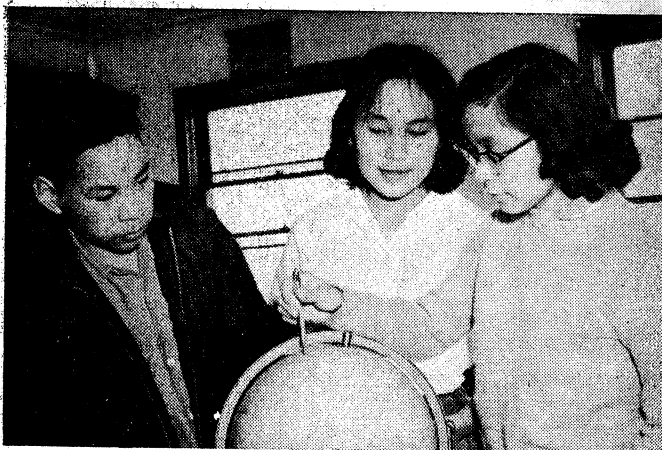
* With Dr. Arden Almquist, right, are, from left, Pastor Paul Carlson, Chairman Dave Key, and Building Committee Chairmen Stan Rottrup.

ministers and institutions. To watch the church in action at the annual meeting in the village of Koyuk was to see a church with a true awareness of selfhood functioning under responsible leadership.

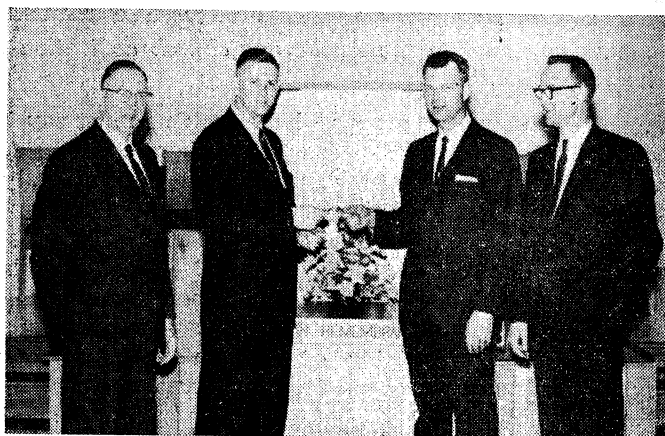
It was a real joy to watch Pastor Walter Outwater of Wales, president, and Mr. Thomas Tungwenuk, secretary, a layman from the Nome church, preside at the worship and business sessions, and to hear the keen observations made by men like Pastor Fred Savok, director of the Eskimo Hour on KICY, and Mr. Stanton Katchatag, layman from Unalakleet and chairman of the church there, as the adoption of a constitution was discussed.

Caught up in this same experience, one of our missionaries, also a delegate, said to me, "It makes me wonder if I'm needed here!"

One also sensed that this church could be fully self-supporting. Government and mission paternalism alike, the latter rooted in the gold scandal that shook our mission at the turn of the century and now maintained largely because of the pres-



Unalakleet high school youth study the globe.



*A key presentation takes place in Anchorage.**



Persons attending the Anchorage church dedication wait in line to receive refreshments.

sure of proselyting groups, have made it hard to apply this aspect of indigenous principles. But the church is on the way to self-support, and once its clergy realize that their own welfare is tied to how well they teach stewardship, progress should be rapid.

The inadequate training of the Eskimo ministry is the root of many of the problems of the Alaska church, including stewardship. The sporadic attempts to maintain our own Bible school have clearly been insufficient, and we should now move toward a Bible Institute maintained cooperatively by the several missions working in Northwest Alaska.

Many who have visited our Alaska field return to comment that the church seems dominated by age. At the Koyuk conference most of the testimonies were given by older, and often very old, people. But young people are more in evidence than they were two and a half years ago, and for this Covenant high school at Unalakleet should receive credit.

We have a large missionary staff in Alaska—some 32 adults, counting those on furlough, with 34 children. It is not unreasonable to ask if this is too large an investment in personnel and funds, given an area as scattered and thinly populated as Alaska is, evangelized for more than three quarters of a century, and patently less strategic than those areas of ferment where the future of Christendom and the world for generations to come may be determined, if the Lord tarries.

One must say in fairness that nowhere could be found a greater devotedness to duty as they conceive it than in our Alaska staff. The concern of the missionaries at Unalakleet for the high school students in their care leads to a surrender of personal privacy and an involvement in the details of people's lives that must take a high toll of both energy and peace of mind. The same can be said for the devotion of the Julius Matsons to the 15 children in their care at the White Mountain home.

The discipline exacted by radio station KICY whose programs *must* appear on schedule, day-in, day-out, requires a sticky kind of nearness that must be experienced to appreciate. The responsibility of deciding whether or not to fly must at times seem an intolerable burden to our missionary pilot, knowing others' lives are in his hand. And the effort to weld into one a church which brings together two vastly different cultures at Anchorage requires a limitless tact and patience.

It was with an awareness of a need to re-evaluate our work that we undertook a field study in Alaska. Searching questions were asked of each of our missionaries—alone, at institutional staff meetings, and in a full council of all of our missionaries gathered at Nome April 6-8.

Preparatory to our coming, a field study guide was sent to each missionary together with four stimulating books: McGavran's *How Churches Grow*, Fife and Glasser's *Missions In Crisis*, Newbiggin's *A*

Faith for This One World? and the Moody Press' *Evangelism in Depth*.

The field study required our staff to examine its goal and priorities; its institutions and organizations; its concern for church growth and indigenous principles; evangelism, student work, literature and radio, social service, and lay missions; and its posture toward urbanization, mission-church relations, and inter-church cooperation.

Departmental provincialism is a threat to missionary effort on all fields. The isolation which space and weather impose on our missionaries in the arctic northland tends to magnify this threat in Alaska. Thus the high school, the radio station, and the children's home tend to function as independent units. Similarly, the huge appetite of institutions plus the sheer expenditure of energy which their development and maintenance requires tend to relegate field evangelism to a secondary role.

The field studies and conferences helped to unite our missionary staff behind common goals and view each others' work as parts of a single effort to win men for Christ and to nourish his church and serve to remind us all that every missionary is first and foremost a witness.

In an earlier visit a year and a half ago Elmer Fondell had set the direction we would move in Alaska. It was clear then that the time was at hand for the *Mission* in Alaska to become the *Church* in Alaska. Our own survey has convinced us that for all practical purposes this means moving from the position of a mission territory to a conference. It is time for the Alaska church to achieve statehood!

A first step in this direction was the adoption in principle of the constitution which Mr. Fondell had helped the mission and church to formulate. This was done at Koyuk. Details remain to be worked out as suggestions for changes continue to come from the churches. But without this initial step the church could neither hope to hold property nor to have the structure necessary to hold it together.

In the same context the Anchorage church cast its lot with Alaska. Its orientation up to this point had been toward the Lower 48. On Palm Sunday we shared in the dedication of

this new church. And with the assurance that Alaska would become the Alaska Conference in the Evangelical Covenant Church of America, our Anchorage church sent Pastor Paul Carlson as a delegate to Koyuk and will increasingly orient its concern toward the state conference.

With this orientation in view, we visited widely separated points in the state. From Anchorage we drove with Pastor Carlson, Maynard Lomborg, and Roald Amundsen to the Kenai, Alaska's most viable area where oil and gas have been discovered and where industry is developing. Pilot Amundsen will now turn his talents to the development of a project in the Kenai which will combine a lay-missions approach for servicing mission aircraft in Alaska with a ministry of evangelism, looking toward a future Covenant church in the Kenai.

We also visited Sitka, this time in the company of Miss Alice Fondell of Seattle, for the purpose of contacting Covenant students from Northwest Alaska who attend the federal high school on Mt. Edgecumbe Island. The principal and religious coordinator introduced us to 77 Covenanters in the school. Miss Fondell remained at Sitka to initiate a counselor ministry to these students. Our hope is to get Covenant laymen into Sitka as teachers, nurses, physicians, and dentists to make this ministry self-supporting.

A visit to Fairbanks was similarly motivated. Fairbanks is strategic for the university which is there and to which Covenant students from our high school and state and federal schools go. An initial step here would be to interest Covenant teachers to seek appointments at the university.

If we admit that in proportion to what we may hope to accomplish in sparsely populated Alaska our investment in personnel and capital is disproportionately large, then we have to move not only in the direction of conference status for the field but also in other directions.

One of these is lay missions. Alaska has the best record of all our fields in this area, but there remains widespread opportunities to be exploited—in teaching, medicine, dentistry, commerce, industry, and government. Encouraging Covenanters



Under the leadership of President Walter Outwater, fourth from left, Covenanters in Alaska hold their annual conference.

to involve their lives in Alaska's future obviously complements the goal of the field becoming a conference.

Another is cooperative effort with other missions. KICY has made a major contribution in Northwest Alaska in presenting the gospel to virtually every home and in helping believers of the several denominations to a more mature faith. It should logically be the concern of all. This means sharing the responsibilities of personnel—the staff is now exclusively Covenant—and finances—the Covenant presently bears 90 per cent of the maintenance costs and bore the entire construction cost. Exploratory talks with the Moravians, Quakers, and Lutherans suggest that others may be willing to share in this ministry. If KICY is to effect a follow-up program of evangelism and literature—without which missionary radio is really not doing its job, it must be done cooperatively. For radio knows no comity boundaries.

The church is beginning to enjoy fruit from Covenant High as former students return to positions of community leadership. At the same time the government is increasing its educational services. The Friends are accordingly having to review critically the question of whether to continue their high school at Kotzebue. Ultimately we would expect there to be a single Christian Academy serving all the missions in Northwest Alaska.

Our children's home actually serves

a much broader community than the Covenant, and since it is virtually self-supporting, there is little point in enlarging the base.

Several missions besides ours operate their own aircraft. In the maintenance of these craft there would be definite advantages in a cooperative effort. Talks have taken place with Missionary Aviation Fellowship, but it would take some doing to get all the missions to turn this area over to MAF. There are distinct advantages to having one's own plane, and it is likely that we will continue to have a Covenant plane, at least in the immediate future.

It is in the area of pastoral training that the missions in Alaska must truly lose themselves if there is to be any hope for a trained Eskimo ministry. But it is precisely in this vital area that one encounters the most resistance to cooperative effort. Each of the missions has such a small base that alone it cannot possibly maintain an effective Bible Institute. Together we could have one good one serving all.

The Mission is becoming the Church. As this happens, the Church in Alaska will also discover its mission. It may well be that when the Iron Curtain falls, Eskimo missionaries will storm the Siberian coast to reap a harvest prepared by the ministry of KICY. And before that young men and women from Covenant High will join the inter-racial teams that will be Covenant missions' new witness to the glory of Christ.