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## **A Study of Conversion in Alaska Native Culture**

### Introduction

The hope of Christ is a hope of new life. New life comes from the hope of transformation, salvation, deliverance, love, justice, mercy, grace, dignity, holiness, redemption, joy, family, and resurrection. Hope in Christ comes through conversion. As a convert rewrites their personal story to reflect a change from their old life to their new life, the Holy Spirit is in turn writing hope into their life.

Christ was crucified and rose again for the Alaska Native people; Inupiat, Yupik, and all other Native peoples. The Creator desires for Creation to be in relationship with Him; to convert to a new life in Him.

### Presuppositions

I love the Alaska Native culture. For almost 10 years I have felt God's calling on my life to serve within the Native culture. During this time, I have visited around 40 different villages in Western (Bush) Alaska. I have been so convinced of this call that my wife (an Alaska Native herself, from the North Slope village of Atkasuk) and I have been missionaries (fund-raising our own salary) within the culture for the last few years, and are committed to spending our lives sharing the hope of Christ with all who will listen.

In my experience within the culture, I have heard many stories about how God miraculously brought about conversion in Alaska Native history. I also have heard occasional stories of missionaries who did damage to the culture. As I set out to tackle this project (originally for a Seminary class assignment) I wanted to try to find out the truth by looking at several historical accounts, both from the Christian and secular perspectives. As a presupposition, I expected to find many more positive stories than negative.

In addition to doing a historical study, I also wanted to get the perspectives of current church leaders who have worked within the Alaska Native culture. I wanted to know their thoughts about conversion. As I tried to craft the five questions I gave in the questionnaire, I expected to find that other church leaders saw both hope and barriers to conversion, but that each of the leaders had a genuine heart for service, Christ and the Native culture.

Lastly, as far as presuppositions, I personally believe that every culture has redeeming qualities as well as destructive qualities. The Alaska Native culture is no different. As the Body of Christ, the church should occasionally take a critical look at what is going well and what could be improved. Through this study, I hope to touch on both.

I hope that through this study of conversion in Alaska Native culture that whoever reads it will be both encouraged in spirit and encouraged to act.

## Short Alaska Native Church History

Shamanism and animism was the religion of the Alaska Native peoples before Christianity was introduced. “The Inupiat world view...was animist. Every observable thing — every feature of the landscape, every animal, every object, every person — is imbued with a soul, or spirit. In addition, there are a number of non-empirical "creatures" having a wide variety of forms.”<sup>1</sup> Shamans reportedly had magical powers; their spirit could leave their body, they could breath under water, could transform into animals, and had many healing abilities.<sup>2</sup> Shamans also would at times compete with each other<sup>3</sup> “Drum singing and dancing are popular with Inupiat and Yupiks. In the old days there were songs to appease the spirits of nature, call the animals and heal or do harm to others. Songs which told of individual experiences or group happenings were composed, choreographed and then sung in front of an audience.”<sup>4</sup>

Eastern Orthodox, Catholics, and others taught that shamans served Satan. Moravians, however, recognized that there were both good and bad shamans.<sup>5</sup> The Alaska Native people also believed in resurrection and reincarnation, “The afterworld...was thought to be a place where souls went to live temporarily while awaiting a new human form.”<sup>6</sup> The belief of reincarnation also greatly influenced the traditions of naming. Before Christianity, many shamans warned the people that a “very powerful light” was coming that would render them relatively powerless.<sup>7</sup> Many former shamans became the best evangelists, although they were not always easily persuaded.<sup>8</sup> Though often attributed solely to Christianity, the religion of the shamans was destroyed by white Western culture. However, many modern doctors and scientists also combated shamanism, not only Christians.<sup>9</sup>

Before any white man brought Christianity to the Native people, God was already at work. Though there are multiple stories about God’s miraculous revelation, two stories are especially powerful; the story of Maniilaq and the story of the Savok family.

Maniilaq was probably born on the upper Kobuk River some time before 1830, and he may have died there in the 1890s. He had many prophecies, including that “The Light will come in the form of the Word”.<sup>10</sup> Maniilaq recognized the Father and the Son as the source of intelligence and thought and that the Father and Son was the most powerful spirit.<sup>11</sup> Maniilaq went on to call the most powerful spirit as “the Grandfather” and even joined with other Shamans that believed in the same spirit, such as Piilaq.<sup>12</sup> “It is said that the shamans saw a thin beam of light originating from somewhere above and going to wherever Maniilaq was...”<sup>13</sup> Maniilaq in turn taught his children and grandchildren about the Grandfather as well.<sup>14</sup> Near the end of his life, Maniilaq prophesied “...people who live on the edge of the great sea to the west are meeting to send a delegation to the south to ask a man and a woman of pale skin to bring the Light of which I have spoken so many times to my people.”<sup>15</sup>

Alaska Native Covenant pastor and author, Fred Savok told a story of his great grandfather, Kalineq, was a shaman who once impaled himself and removed the pole, showing that he was unharmed.<sup>16</sup> Egaq, Savok’s father-in-law, had a vision of a “Man of the Sky” that claimed to be the “Father of all people,” and that soon his people would know Him. Shortly after, Egaq met Uyarak (sometimes spelled “Uyabak”), the Native missionary who told them more about the “Man of the Sky”.<sup>17</sup> Some Natives sought out the teachings of the “Man in the

Sky” to the extent that they left their home villages and traveled to Unalakleet of their own accord.<sup>18</sup> Savok went on to report that “the goal of the Covenant Mission was not to change the lifestyle of the Eskimo. It was simply to introduce God to the people of the region.”<sup>19</sup>

Savok spoke of his grandparents who sent their daughter (his mother) to the Covenant school in Unalakleet and then traveled there themselves yearning to read “the Book” and better understand God’s message to them. Savok describes his relatives as living in fear of breaking superstitious beliefs that could have deadly consequences. Through interaction with the Covenant missionaries, Savok’s family learned a new way of life without fear. He says the Eskimos continued dancing and participating in sports, they continued gift-giving and some superstitious beliefs were maintained. However, Savok records the most noticeable change the Covenant missionaries brought was less fear and more freedom of actions.<sup>20</sup>

Occasionally, Christianity is credited with the destruction of the Alaska Native culture, not only their religion. Many Alaska church historians contend that it was other white men in Bush Alaska that contributed to the loss of Native culture that has regrettably occurred to some extent. For example, Albin Johnson, a Covenant missionary wrote about the “degenerate and selfish white men, who for personal gain were quite willing to contribute to the degradation of the very people he sought to uplift.”<sup>21</sup> Edna McLean, renowned secular Alaska Native scholar and historian noted that “the first white men that the Inuit encountered were explorers and whalers.”<sup>22</sup> “The second wave of white men to reach the Yupiks and Inupiat were Christian missionaries.”<sup>23</sup> In 1888, the inhabitants of 3 out of 4 Eskimo villages on St. Lawrence Island were completely wiped out. The reason cited was that whiskey was introduced in such excess, that the people forgot to hunt and all starved to death.<sup>24</sup> “White men decimated the whale and walrus and drove the caribou into the interior, while introducing whiskey, prostitution, and disease.”<sup>25</sup> Another missionary wrote about “evils like liquor, which so readily destroys the character of a people introduced precipitously...to the white man’s culture.”<sup>26</sup> The white man was credited with stealing land as well, “In some cases the U.S. government blatantly usurped land occupied by indigenous peoples.”<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, McLean speaking of missionaries, claims, “They were relentless in their self-righteousness, and considered it their divinely-inspired obligation to disrupt the social, educational and religious activities of the Yupiks and Inupiat.”<sup>28</sup> McLean also says, “The Native peoples of Alaska were taught that their languages were not important, their religion was bad and that they should become like the white man as quickly as possible.”<sup>29</sup> Despite McLean’s claim about missionaries, she also reports that Native languages were not allowed to be taught in the schools by order of the government. Many blamed the missionaries, who ran the schools; however, the rules were given by the Department of the Interior and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Additional blame was cast upon Sheldon Jackson, the Commissioner of Education.<sup>30</sup> Eben Hopson, the first North Slope Borough Mayor also spoke poorly of schools, saying, “The educational policy was to attempt to assimilate us into the American mainstream at the expense of our culture. The schools were committed to teaching us to forget our language and Inupiaq heritage.”<sup>31</sup>

For the most part, Christianity was introduced to Bush Alaska in the late 1800’s because of Sheldon Jackson. Sheldon Jackson was a government official who used his influence to

secure funding for missionaries to enter into Bush Alaska, mainly under the context of education. In 1880, Sheldon Jackson began seeking denominations to help evangelize the Bush, and many denominations refused. Jackson's plan was to divide Alaska into denominational regions so as to more effectively spread the Gospel without competition. Jackson's plan was called the "Comity Plan."<sup>32</sup> Likely because of the sensitive nature of church and state relations, there are few and somewhat conflicting reports about the plan. In fact, many historians even deny that the plan existed. There is significant documentation, however, especially among church groups to give witness to the plan.<sup>33</sup>

According to early documents, Jackson, a Presbyterian, enlisted five other denominations to join his own which was already working in the Southeast region and was beginning work on the North Slope region. Those denominations were the Baptists (given the Kodiak and Cook Inlet region), the Episcopalians/Anglicans (given the Yukon region), the Methodists (given the Aleutian Islands), the Moravians (given the Yukon-Kuskokwim region), and the Congregationalists (given the Cape Prince of Wales region). By the time the agreement was reached in 1884, by one account, four other denominations joined. The additional four were the Salvation Army (given the remote Southeast region), the Catholics (given the Lower Yukon region), the Covenant church (given the Norton Sound), and the Quakers, otherwise known as Religious Society of Friends (given the Nana region). Most historians claim that the latter four were not part of the Comity Plan, as Burch notes, "The Mission Covenant was not party to the comity plan, and its members probably did not know about it."<sup>34</sup> I tend to disagree, however, in part because of Axel Karlson's knowledge of Sheldon and some of the interactions he had with him. Regardless, in most cases among the 10 denominations, the mission work began a few years after the agreement, as with the Covenant church, which began its work in 1887.<sup>35</sup> The Lutheran church, an 11<sup>th</sup> denomination, joined the field 10 years later in 1894.<sup>36</sup>

The cooperation of the denominations in Alaska, in general, remained very strong and positive. Regions and villages were often exchanged with these friendly relationships. For example, the village of Yakutat was traded for Wales with the Presbyterians.<sup>37</sup> The villages of Candle and Little Diomed were given to the Covenant by the Friends and the Lutherans, respectively.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, though I could find no documentation to support it, I have been told that the Covenant villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region were given to them by the Moravians. (I can find no other reason why the Covenant would be in the Moravian region). The Covenant also gave up several villages reached within the first decade of ministry including: Egavik, Fish River, Selawik, Noatak, Kotzebue, Diomed,<sup>39</sup> Solomon and Bluff (between Nome and White Mountain).<sup>40</sup> Also given in the past 50 years include: Wales, Council, Solomon, Candle, Haycock, and Marshall.<sup>41</sup> Some of those villages were given up because the population moved on and there is no longer a current village in those locations, most, however, were given to other denominations.

Early missionaries were concerned with much more than simply declaring the Gospel message. The Friends reported that "missionaries plunged right in, preaching the gospel, challenging the shamans, persuading people to abandon ancient burial customs, attacking polygamy, promoting Christian marriage, and fulminating against drinking, gambling, smoking and dancing."<sup>42</sup> The Covenant stated that evangelism is more than declaring the Good News, but evangelism is also "teaching, ministering to physical needs, improving communications, and so

forth.”<sup>43</sup> Early missionaries often used their own money to fund the missions.<sup>44</sup> “By 1897, after seven years of effort, the Congregationalist, Episcopalian and Presbyterian missionaries working in Arctic Alaska had saved many lives through medical treatment. They had also made some progress in teaching Inupiaq children the rudiments of arithmetic, the industrial arts, and speaking, reading and writing English.”<sup>45</sup> Ernst Larson, a Covenant missionary, was instrumental pioneering the art of agriculture in the Arctic, not only for Covenant people, but for the whole state.<sup>46</sup> Several pastors were also pilots.<sup>47</sup> Women missionaries also served in the Bush; most notably in the Covenant was Ruth Ost, who served for 42 years, despite spending much of that time confined to a wheelchair due to severe arthritis. Ruth spent many years as matron of the Children’s Home and as a midwife.<sup>48</sup> In the 1940’s, many of the missionaries that came to Alaska came “concerned with relief for the poor;”<sup>49</sup> “Amidst the cycle created with the loss of identity for Natives in the villages, the Covenant Church, with its reputation of compassion and sincerity, exists both as a connection to the past and a way of hope for the future.”<sup>50</sup>

Early missionaries, in general, strived to keep the Alaska Native culture. The Covenant missionaries were not “interested in changing the lifestyle of the Eskimo,” but to transform the Eskimo into a “a complete child of God with a new direction and purpose”<sup>51</sup> “The missionaries were committed to a whole person, the mind, body, and soul...The culture and tradition were left intact...the Eskimo villages along the coast continued to enjoy gatherings with much gift-giving, races, and dances, activities that did not involve evil spirits.”<sup>52</sup> Many missionaries became fluent in Alaska Native language, such as Reverend Doctor William Peacock.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, many early Alaska Native pastors never learned English fluently, but did ministry in their native tongue.<sup>54</sup> The Catholic and Orthodox (both Eastern and Russian) churches both also attempted to keep the Native languages intact.<sup>55</sup> The missionaries did, however, give English names to Natives when the Eskimo names were too hard for them to pronounce.<sup>56</sup> Much to their credit, the Moravians did not seek to “anglicize” the Alaska Natives which was in part because of their more than 100 years already working with Native people in Canada.<sup>57</sup> According to the perspective of Savok, Natives realized the message of the missionaries was compassion and freedom. Savok writes that these particular white people were not taking advantage of the Natives, but were kind and honest.<sup>58</sup>

Not all interactions were positive, though most were; during early missions, some activities that were considered “strange” by the missionaries were banned.<sup>59</sup> “It was, indeed, a problem for the Episcopalians and Presbyterians. Missionaries from these two religions disparaged animist beliefs as superstitious, hence at least implicitly stupid, and ridiculed people who held them. I do not know how the Congregationalists dealt with this problem, but Uyaraq and the Samms [a Friend’s missionary] took a very different approach. Instead of denying the existence of the multitude of spirits in the traditional Inupiaq world, they simply declared them to be agents of the Devil. This made them evil, but also vulnerable to Christian attack. Given this interpretation, it was possible for Inupiat to become Christian without abandoning or even modifying their traditional world view”<sup>60</sup>

“Christianity, as understood by many, if not most, of the early converts, involved the interplay between one munificent spirit — God, and one evil one — the Devil. To promote the victory of the former over the latter, they thought that Christianity, like the traditional Inupiaq

religion, required the use of amulets — in the form of the Bible; charms or spells — in the form of hymns and prayers; and taboos — in the form of prohibitions against smoking, dancing, gambling, drinking and failing to observe the Sabbath, as well as the Ten Commandments. If the amulets and charms were used correctly and the prohibitions were obeyed, salvation in the next world and a better life in this one were expected to come about automatically.”<sup>61</sup>

The Covenant church first became aware of the Alaska mission field before the Comity Plan. Scandinavian explorer, A. E. Nordenskjold went to the North Pole in 1878-79 and noticed the need for missionaries to the Eskimo people and told the Mission Covenant of Sweden about the need.<sup>62</sup> The Covenant sent two missionaries, one staying in Yakutat, Indian Territory, and the other heading toward the Norton Sound. The missionary heading toward the Eskimo people was Axel Karlson (sometimes spelled Karlsson) from Sweden, who spoke Russian. Axel Mellander, professor at North Park, speaking of Axel Karlson said, “When he came, there were no Christians; when he left, there were no pagans.”<sup>63</sup> Secular historian, Ernest Burch Jr., took note of these phenomena, stating “The transformation of the Arctic Inupiaq population from zero to nearly 100 percent Christianity in less than a single generation requires explanation.”<sup>64</sup> McLean states, “The missionaries had a relatively easy task of assembling followers for their churches in northern Alaska.”<sup>65</sup> She also explained, “The Christian religion has been embraced strongly by Inupiat and Yupiks. This is not difficult to understand because the Inupiaq and Yupiks are very spiritual people. Secondly, the Christian concepts of resurrection and a person's ability to perform 'miracles', and the story of creation pertaining to a period of darkness and then of light, were already part of the spiritual beliefs and realities of the traditional system of beliefs.”<sup>66</sup> Also, many former shamans became the best evangelists, although they were not always easily persuaded.<sup>67</sup>

The first Russian-speaking Eskimo that Karlson met was the chief at Unalakleet, Nashalook. Karlson also befriended an orphaned teen-age Eskimo boy named Uyarak, or Rock. Karlson taught him English and Rock became Karlson's first convert as well as his interpreter and sled dog driver.<sup>68</sup> The first mission station, completed in 1889, functioned as a church and a school in Unalakleet. Both English and the Eskimo languages were spoken at this school.<sup>69</sup> One of Karlson's first converts, Stephen Ivanoff, left the village and went to North Park College. Ultimately, Ivanoff's pursuits were offensive to his people. The chief and council of Unalakleet ordered Ivanoff and his wife to leave the village. They moved to Shaktoolik and started a school and a Covenant Church.<sup>70</sup>

Though success eventually came, from when Axel Karlson arrived, several years passed before much fruit was shown in conversion.<sup>71</sup> Karlson noted that there was a lot drinking and gambling in village before he arrived.<sup>72</sup> “By the fall of 1889...the Inupiaqs were not as willing to accept his message of the gospel...Karlson recognized that his primary task was to win friends before attempting to win converts.”<sup>73</sup> “By the early 1890's...Alaska Natives in and around Unalakleet were coming to faith.”<sup>74</sup> Karlson's Eskimo name was “Isregalik,” meaning, “the man with the glass eyes.”<sup>75</sup> “Converts had to study from several months to a year before receiving baptism.”<sup>76</sup>

The success of Karlson has been directly attributed to the conversion of Uyaraq, who became Karlson's translator and a powerful evangelist in his own right. “Uyaraq's most

effective approach was deliberately to break taboos and to ridicule shamans while holding up a Bible. He did so while proclaiming that the book represented a spirit far more powerful than anything in the entire Inupiaq pantheon, and that this powerful spirit is what protected him. Uyaraq was particularly active at some of the summer trade fairs in the mid-1890s, where he could attract large audiences. His work not only undermined the shamans, it cast doubt on the entire Inupiaq belief system.”<sup>77</sup>

Not all of the early church’s actions were positive, however. In 1898, the Covenant began to be rocked by a scandal that would last for almost 20 years. The Gospel message was abandoned by some in favor of riches. The Gold Rush began the scandal of Number 9 Above.<sup>78</sup> The Covenant missionaries at Golovin “abandoned their posts and joined the mobs in their quest for wealth” on the golden beaches and rivers of Nome.<sup>79</sup> P.H. Anderson (one of the aforementioned missionaries) was even accused of “indiscreet conduct toward an Eskimo girl” by a fellow former missionary.<sup>80</sup> The three Covenant missionaries who abandoned their posts ended up striking it rich, amassing a fortune of more than \$400,000. The scandal of the money, however, was that the location where most of the gold was found was originally claimed in the name of an Eskimo boy, Gabriel.<sup>81</sup> The three Covenanters reclaimed the location as a “Mission claim” which was supposedly to go towards supporting ministry. Anderson received most of the money and gave little to the church. Of the small amount given to the church, little was used for Alaskan ministry. Instead, the money went to the Lower 48. Money used from the “Mission claim” went to build two buildings on North Park College campus, including the President’s home, partially paid for the gymnasium, and also built Swedish Covenant Hospital.<sup>82</sup> The use of the “Mission claim” money was a source of bitterness among some in Alaska, as one Covenant pastor I personally have talked to believes North Park stole Alaskan money. Furthermore, the Eskimo family of Gabriel, who originally had the claim, sued Anderson saying the claim rightfully belonged to them. They eventually settled out of court for a sum of \$25,000 plus attorney fees, of which only \$17,500 was actually paid out to the family.<sup>83</sup>

When Moravian missions began in 1885 with the Yupik people,<sup>84</sup> most missionaries were preceded by white traders.<sup>85</sup> Missionaries usually attended to multiple villages at once.<sup>86</sup> By 1890, more than 1,000 natives were regularly attending Moravian village churches.<sup>87</sup> However, Reverend Kilbuck (one of five original Moravian missionaries) observed that most Alaska Native converts were “nominal Christians.”<sup>88</sup> In the Covenant, before 1903, 279 Natives had been baptized, and 375 were church members. In 1903 alone, that number almost doubled.<sup>89</sup> However, by the early 1900s, epidemics began to decimate the Native peoples.<sup>90</sup>

“The Friends church began work around and noted in 1890 there probably was not a single Christian Inupiaq Eskimo. Twenty years later, there was scarcely an Inupiaq who was not a Christian.”<sup>91</sup> “The foundation for this dramatic development was laid in Kotzebue Sound between 1897 and 1902 by Robert and Carrie Samms, of the Friends Church, and by an Inupiaq Eskimo named Uyaraq, who had been converted earlier by Covenant missionaries located south of the study area.”<sup>92</sup> By the winter of 1895-96, the Friends were working with “three Native assistants in addition to Uyaraq.”<sup>93</sup> “With regard to religious conversions, however, their record was modest: perhaps 75 converts at Wales, and none at either Point Hope or Barrow. Their Covenant colleagues at Golovin and Unalakleet had been more successful, with perhaps 125 converts, but of course they had had a three year head start”<sup>94</sup> Frustrated by the lack of religious

progress, a missionary sent a letter to the Covenant missionaries, “inviting them to visit Wales and help conduct a revival meeting. In March, 1895, David Johnson arrived from Unalakleet with two Native assistants.”<sup>95</sup> “Over the next few years Lopp was able to build on this base to some extent, and by 1901, the year after he left the mission; there were about 100 converts in the Wales area”<sup>96</sup>

By June, 1900, after only three years of work, the Friends church reported 70 members had been enrolled in the church “on profession of faith” “Individuals who broke their pledge not to drink or smoke were stricken from the list, as were those who engaged in sexual liaisons out of Christian wedlock.”<sup>97</sup> The early Friends church reported that “The new faith within the Native community was both genuine and self-sustaining. Native converts held regular services wherever they were, regardless of whether or not Whites were present; they observed the Sabbath; they prayed before meals and before going to bed at night; they broke ancient taboos; they had marriages solemnized whenever they could get to Kotzebue; and they tried not to drink, gamble, smoke or dance.”<sup>98</sup>

“Inupiat converted by the Friends at Kotzebue soon began to evangelize on their own, particularly along the Kobuk River. During the winter of 1900-01, Kobuk Inupiat held eight Sunday services, with an average attendance of 40. They reported that “a number of these (about 50) profess to be Christians, and there seems to be a general turning among the older ones to Christianity, even the chief expressing himself favorably to it” ([Jackson 1903](#): 1254). At a Sunday service in Kotzebue on February 9, 1902, 71 people attended, including people “who either lived or have lived at” the Kugruk, Selawik and Buckland Rivers, and several small settlements along the north shore of Kotzebue Sound, as well as people from Kotzebue itself ([Hadley 1969](#): 131). Also during that winter, one of the Inupiaq members, John Armstrong, made two evangelizing trips, one to the north shore of Kotzebue Sound, and the other up the Noatak River ([Hadley 1902](#): 43).”<sup>99</sup> “In the space of a mere ten years, Inupiaq evangelists had spread the new religion over 900 miles east of its starting point on Kotzebue Sound.”<sup>100</sup>

Not all early encounters between missionary and Alaska Native yielded positive results. “One of the first two Congregationalist missionaries at Wales was assassinated by some Inupiaq youths.”<sup>101</sup> “At Unalakleet things started badly in 1887 for the Covenants when some men threatened to kill the missionary, Axel Karlson. He was forced to live under Nashalook’s protection for three months.”<sup>102</sup> “Despite the apparently favorable circumstances which brought them there, the Friends were not universally welcomed. Like their counterparts at the other mission stations, they were frequently harassed by drunks and harangued by shamans.”<sup>103</sup>

Early Presbyterian efforts in Barrow were also “less dramatic” than other denominations, as missionary work there was “delayed by a number of practical problems and distractions; conversions there were slow in coming”.<sup>104</sup> “Most Inupiat, including those at Point Hope and Barrow, were converted by other Inupiat.”<sup>105</sup>

In the decade of 1905-1915, the Moravian church called these the “growth years,” while 1915-1919 were “war years.” 447 converts were baptized from 1900-1910 in the Norton Sound<sup>106</sup> The Covenant soon faced financial problems as giving from the Denomination went from \$14,000 a year to \$2,800 a year within 5 years.<sup>107</sup> From 1911-1921, the Alaska Covenant’s



debt steadily grew from \$6,000 to \$13,000.<sup>108</sup> As a result, 1912-1932 saw a sharp decline in Covenant missionary involvement.<sup>109</sup> During this time there were many Native leaders, although the whites were always in charge over the Natives.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, churches were built and started by Eskimos as well as whites.<sup>111</sup> In 1919, the Covenant saw their first Native Covenant missionary pastor, Wilson Gonongnan.<sup>112</sup>

The 1920's saw continued church growth,<sup>113</sup> and by 1929, the Gospel was translated and distributed to the Yupik villages.<sup>114</sup> Wycliffe Bible Translators were instrumental in creating both the Yupik and Inupiaq Bibles.<sup>115</sup> No longer could the Moravian church claim, "The language barrier and the lack of Scriptures in the Eskimo tongue may have contributed to spiritual immaturity."<sup>116</sup> In 1921, the Covenant sent missionaries (including 2 Native missionaries) to Siberia.<sup>117</sup> In 1926 the Hooper Bay church was built and in 1929 Scammon Bay church was built.

The 1930's brought both struggles and joy in anticipation of the year of Jubilee (50 years of ministry). The greatest church struggle seemed to be that the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment was repealed in 1933. The repeal increased consumption and allowed liquor to flow freely in the villages, "casting a shadow" on the ministry.<sup>118</sup> The Covenant church reported in that "liquor is our arch-enemy" and that non-Christian "white men and his evil influences"<sup>119</sup> (especially fishermen) were setting examples of "drinking, smoking, gambling, dancing, [and] breaking the Sabbath." The Covenant also added that "marriage and family life are not given the sanctity and respect the Bible teaches."<sup>120</sup> By 1935 church attendance was reported as not "as good as used to be."<sup>121</sup> Additionally, the worldwide Moravian church faced great financial difficulties in the 1930's as the Great Depression affected missions.<sup>122</sup>

As for joys in the 1930's, the Covenant church was well attended in the bilingual church services. By 1930 the Covenant had already begun mission work in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region.<sup>123</sup> The Covenant also reported in their annual meeting that many of the gatherings from the old Eskimo religion had been replaced by Covenant meetings.<sup>124</sup> Additionally, the Covenant sent a Native missionary internationally, sending Alaska Native Harry Soxie to Siberia.<sup>125</sup> Missionary E.M. Axelson reported that "as a missionary, I am asked to assist in almost every field of human endeavor."<sup>126</sup> Axelson made an appeal to the Covenant church in the Lower 48 to send more Christian doctors, teachers, and fishermen to combat the negative white influence.<sup>127</sup> In 1936, White Mountain had a Sunday school of 130, with six Eskimo teachers.<sup>128</sup> In 1937, the Covenant had 30 men and women enrolled in their local Bible school.<sup>129</sup>

By 1940, the Covenant had 12 churches that were ministering in the Bush.<sup>130</sup> In 1941, the Covenant requested to take over ministry in Nome from the Methodist church. Although the Methodists did not turn over Nome, they did allow the Covenant to begin working in Nome in addition to their own work. Also in 1941, "splendid attendance" was reported among Norton Sound churches.<sup>131</sup>

Schools and churches went hand in hand, due largely to the newly appointed General Agent of Education, Sheldon Jackson, securing funds (around \$25,000) for education in the Bush. Government mandated that schools taught children in the English language, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, oral history, physiology, and temperance hygiene.<sup>132</sup> The

Moravians first school, a boarding school, was built in 1902 in Bethel. Both building costs and missionaries' salaries came from government funding. Studies in the Moravian school included academics in the mornings and vocational training in the afternoons, such as carpentry, machinery, net mending, baking, washing, gardening, and sewing.<sup>133</sup> However, the church and state relationship came to a screeching halt in 1912 when mission schools began to be retaken by the government and non-Christians took over missionary positions.<sup>134</sup> Fortunately, the government was slow in taking over all village schools. For the Covenant, in 1890, one year after the school in Unalakleet opened, there were 40 students. By 1899, there were 93, and by 1905 there were 285. Numbers declined when the government finally took the school over in 1927.<sup>135</sup>

After the government took over the Moravian school, the school became a public school, rather than a boarding school. The Moravian church responded by opening "The Orphanage" in 1914.<sup>136</sup> In 1926, the orphanage once again became a mission school, this time fully funded by the church. Because of tuberculosis, there were many orphans who attended the school. In 1946, the orphanage became the "Moravian Children Home" opening its doors to government welfare cases.<sup>137</sup> In 1949, the Moravians began a Bible School which became a Seminary in 1955. In the 1960's, enrollment in the school declined as many promising students were influenced to join the National Guard. In the 1970's, the school was more successful and saw many Alaska Native graduates go on to other state and Lower 48 colleges.<sup>138</sup>

From 1950 onwards, the ministry was "marked by rapid changes." McLean speaks of this rapid change from a secular perspective, "The changes that have occurred in the lifetimes of our elders almost defy belief. Most of the time there is no time to react, no time for comprehensive planning."<sup>139</sup> In the Moravian church, Alaska Native leaders assumed full church leadership, even up to the top level of Alaska church leadership.<sup>140</sup> In the Covenant church as well, most small villages were pastored by Alaska Natives. The success of Native leadership was partially attributed to the local Bible Institute<sup>141</sup> as well as Some Eskimos were trained at Covenant Bible Institute in Canada.<sup>142</sup> The Covenant's Children's Home also continued to be a vital ministry.<sup>143</sup> Vacation Bible School ministry became a big operation in both the Moravian and Covenant churches. The Covenant reported that there was a Vacation Bible School in every Covenant village.<sup>144</sup> "In 1954 an Easter offering of \$1,148.38 was received."<sup>145</sup> Also in 1954 the Covenant church called an interdenominational conference of Moravians, Covenanters, Lutherans, and Friends.<sup>146</sup> Not all interdenominational relations were as positive, however. In the late 1950's, a few rogue denominations began to move into Covenant villages, causing confusion and division among the Eskimos. The Covenant noted these "invasions" namely because there were still villages with no church which the denominations could have gone instead.<sup>147</sup>

In 1960, many advancements were made in the Covenant church. The Bible Seminary in Unalakleet "reactivated"<sup>148</sup> and 35 students were enrolled in Covenant High School. After visiting Unalakleet, the Friends church began a Bible school of their own.<sup>149</sup> The Covenant radio station KICY also began to transmit in 1960. KICY became such an effective ministry that even the Moravian denomination contributed financially to KICY.<sup>150</sup> Also significant was that the Covenant reported that church membership had reached over 1,000.<sup>151</sup> As a struggle, the Covenant reported that "many changes taking place in Alaska also bring great temptations to the

Native Christians,” citing a desire for more money and a higher standard of living, as well as “big city temptations.”<sup>152</sup>

In 1962, the Covenant reported “We are well on the way to a truly indigenous work in Alaska.” –Arden Almquist.<sup>153</sup> At the same time Almquist commented that “not until rather recently were indigenous principles firmly adopted and a firm effort made to apply them.”<sup>154</sup> In 1962, the Covenant celebrated 75 years of ministry in which about 120 missionaries worked either short or long term in Alaska.<sup>155</sup> In a separate report from Almquist in 1962, the Covenant reported that problems facing the church were “a lack of trained Eskimo pastors, instability among the converts, [and] insufficient stewardship.”<sup>156</sup>

The 1960’s and 1970’s saw continued growth in Moravian projects, and in 1977, the first Alaska Native was ordained in the Bethlehem, Pennsylvania based Moravian Seminary.<sup>157</sup> Covenant High School continued to grow, reporting 55 students in 1966. In 1970, a shift was made so that no distinction was purposefully made between Native and non-Native staff during roll-call in the Covenant church. In 1971, Covenant High School reported the highest rate of graduates in the entire state of public and private boarding schools, while the denomination reported that “Eskimo pastors are growing in stature.”<sup>158</sup> In 1972, a bill was adopted in attempt to reclaim lost Native language and culture, requiring bilingual and bicultural education where applicable.<sup>159</sup> Covenant High School was ahead of the curve. However, in 1976, a government run High School was started in Unalakleet, threatening Covenant High School, prompting “serious consideration to closing.”<sup>160</sup> In 1977, the Moravians had 21 village churches, Friends 9, and Covenant 12.<sup>161</sup> For the Covenant, 10 of 12 village churches had their own pastors, while the remaining two, White Mountain and Golovin, shared a pastor.<sup>162</sup> In 1979, the Covenant church was reported as still growing strong.<sup>163</sup>

In 1983, the Moravian church saw its first Alaska Native become a Bishop in the nationwide church and the church declared that “the independent, indigenous Church has become a reality.”<sup>164</sup> While the Covenant also saw much more indigenous leadership, they faced some problems (mainly financial) in the 1980’s. In 1985, Covenant High School closed. In a 1989 report from a Covenant village, 29 children were in Sunday school.<sup>165</sup> One of the largest obstacles the 1980’s church faced was materialism and the greed, which was taught by the Western culture.<sup>166</sup>

As with almost all mission efforts, finances in Alaska have been more or less difficult at different time periods. In 1962, Arden believes that part of the answer is encouraging stewardship by turning the churches entirely over to local leadership and abandoning the view of Alaska as a mission field.<sup>167</sup> This shift eventually came to pass years later when Alaska became its own home field, no longer a mission field. However, since that time my own observation is that finances, for the most part, have not improved. A recent move in the past couple of years has been to reach out to the Lower 48 Covenant fields and have asked them to adopt struggling churches, partially reversing the idea of not being a mission field.

The spirit of cooperation among the denominations of Alaska still exists to this day. The Alaska Christian Conference still currently meets biennially with the American Baptist Churches, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopal Church, Evangelical Covenant

Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Friends Church, Moravian Church, Presbyterian Church USA, Roman Catholic Church, Salvation Army, and the United Methodist Church all as members.<sup>168</sup>

Unfortunately, very little is written about church history in Bush Alaska in the last 20-25 years. To get a sobering perspective of issues the church faces today in ministry, one could look at McLean's own analysis. McLean speaks of the current state of her culture, "The disruptive effects of rapid social and cultural change have wrought havoc on Alaskan Native families and communities. This is reflected in a depressing array of social problems including a high suicide rate among young Alaskan Natives, a high incidence of alcohol and drug abuse, the fetal alcohol syndrome, the breakdown of the extended family and clan system, loss of children to the welfare system, loss of language, lack of transmission of cultural knowledge and values, apathy, depression, low academic achievement and high drop-out rate, transitional problems between village and cities and the dilemma of integrating traditional and non-traditional economic systems (subsistence versus cash-based lifestyle)."<sup>169</sup>

In a 2003 survey of Native Alaskans conducted by an Anchorage, Alaska consulting company, respondents reported that the top four issues facing Alaska Natives were subsistence, education, jobs, and substance abuse (McDowell Group, 2003).<sup>170</sup> A recent summary of SLiCA surveys reported widespread subsistence activity throughout the arctic (including Alaska), and respondents reported that the major problems in their communities were a lack of jobs, substance abuse, suicide, and family and sexual violence (Leask, 2007).<sup>171</sup> Three other important measures are dramatically higher in Alaska than the rest of the U.S.: the incidence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD); infant mortality; and tuberculosis.<sup>172</sup>

Another item of particular interest for today's church should be that the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act settled land claims of the aboriginal peoples of Alaska by transferring approximately 44 million acres of public land and nearly \$1 billion through twelve regional Native corporations and approximately 200 village corporations (Colt, 2001).<sup>173</sup> Some corporations are especially cooperative with religious organizations, while others are much more uncooperative. The Alaska Native church has a much more complex system to work within than it once did.

Though I could not find any concrete demographics of Natives, in 2006, approximately 47,196 Natives were enrolled in Eskimo (Inupiat and Yupik) Native Corporations.<sup>174</sup> This number is most likely very close to the actual population. With a rich history behind it and serious needs in front of it, the Alaska church has its work cut out as they seek to reach all nearly 50,000 Alaska Natives.

## Research Methods

When I began this project, I started with a 10 question survey that I hoped 20 church leaders working with Alaska Native people would answer. To me a church leader was someone who was more than just a church attender. A church leader must have been acknowledged by other church leadership as being a leader and has also intentionally taken part in ministry in the Alaska Native culture. Before sending the survey to church leaders, I realized that I needed to cut my survey down in size if I wanted church leaders to answer honestly and at some length. What results was the questionnaire of two identifying questions and five questions about conversion. (See appendix C for the questionnaire used)

With the questionnaire complete, I began making a list of people I knew personally and had contact information for that had experience in ministry within the Alaska Native culture. The list I produced astounded me. For years I have shared with others that I felt one of the barriers to effective ministry in Alaska Native culture is the lack of workers. I came up with a list of about 125 workers. Considering the amount of Yupik and Inupiat villages, just from the list I compiled, theoretically, every village could probably have a church leader!

Through this list I emailed, called, and gave the questionnaire out face-to-face. I did very little to follow up with people so as to receive the questionnaires back. However, 45 people responded, a very pleasant response. (Two of the responses were given as couples in ministry answering together, therefore the 45 respondents returned 43 questionnaires).

As a disclaimer, I recognize that even though I am pleased with the response, to be scientific, more church leaders probably should be surveyed. Additionally, I have no training or experience in giving or analyzing a survey of this nature. Therefore, the results of this survey should be seen as purely anecdotal, but hopefully point to truths that can be applied for more effective ministry.

As I collected the responses, I entered them into a document (see appendix D) and made them all uniform in response. The first task I completed with the responses was to compile demographic information (see appendix A). Next I analyzed the results, seeking to find common language or responses in the individual questions (see appendix B). During this analysis, I took some liberty in interpreting the results. I combined some common responses that others may not have, and I separated other response that some may have grouped together. I also left some responses off of the charts if I either did not understand the response or if the response was abstract enough that I thought it would not be a common response. After compiling the results, I identified those answers that had been mention five or more times among all 43 questionnaires. Those common responses are listed in the findings below. (The one exception is the response of “Art” under question number 3. I included this answer because of the significance I thought the answer could have on future application of this study).

## Findings and Common Responses

### *Demographics*

Although not all the respondents answered the demographic questions completely, the majority gave adequate information.

#### *Ethnicity*

Caucasian – 80%, Alaska Native – 16%, Other – 4%

#### *Gender*

Male – 64%, Female – 36%

#### *Years in Alaska Native Ministry*

Less than 2 years – 26%, 2-5 years – 18%, 5-10 years – 11%, More than 10 years – 45%

#### *Role in Ministry*

Youth/Young Adult Ministry – 81%, Pastor – 17%, Worship Ministry – 2%

#### *People Group Working With*

Inupiat – 11%, Yupik – 11%, Both – 78%

For the most part, the demographics speak for themselves. Although I sent the questionnaire to a much higher percentage of Alaska Native church leaders, the majority of respondents were white. I attribute this mostly to the nature of a research project; that surveys are a Western culture phenomenon.

The breakdown of gender was a little bit surprising, considering that church leadership in Bush Alaska is largely dominated by men.

Among those who responded, I was quite amazed at the responses of those that had been in ministry for more than 10 years. Most of the church leaders that I asked to respond, did respond. That such a large percentage would respond, to me, speaks of the commitment the church leaders have to seeing Alaska Native people converted.

The response of those in Youth/Young Adult Ministry was not very surprising, since in my travels to nearly 40 villages, I have mostly connected with fellow youth workers.

The final demographic question was suggested by my professor to see if there were differences between the Yupik and Inupiat church leaders. However, the responses indicate to me that if there are differences, this survey will not be effective in addressing them.

1. *What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?*
  - Spiritual awareness
  - Belief in a Provider/Creator
  - Community hospitality

- Respect for Elders
  - Dependence on the land/Stewardship
  - Respect for others
  - Church history
  - Receptive to the Gospel
  - Generosity
2. *What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?*
- “White” Christianity
  - Culture has been abused
  - Abuse (physical/sexual)
  - Peer/family pressure
3. *What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?*
- Music (Worship)
  - Testimony
  - Native Dance
  - Interaction with Creation
  - Art
4. *What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?*
- Place faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior through belief in His life, death, & resurrection
  - Awareness of spiritual need
  - Holy Spirit
  - Life change
  - Repentance of sin
  - Surrender
  - Outward confession
5. *What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?*
- Mentoring/discipling
  - More youth outreach
  - More indigenous leaders
  - Holy Spirit
  - Holistic ministry
  - Realize the grace in the Image of God
  - Relational evangelism
  - God’s Word
  - Commitment
  - Lead by example
  - Teach that Christ gives dignity
  - Prayer
  - Relevant Native church

## Evaluation

### *1. What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?*

The responses to question number 1 are no real surprise. Through our study of conversion in the history of the Alaska Native church we have already witnessed most of these characteristics. The three areas that perhaps were not mentioned as much in the history were community hospitality, respect for Elders, and generosity. Each of these characteristics speak to the humble nature of the Alaska Native people. The first and last items are fairly self explanatory. The second speaks to how Elders are treated in the community. The Native culture is a culture of social justice, looking out for each other. Even to this day, Native young people will give their first catch of fish, caribou, or whatever it may be to an Elder. They also make this a practice of parts of future catches. Some Christians have used this concept to speak of God as the ultimate Elder.

### *2. What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?*

The responses to question number 2 are also no surprise in light of our historical study. The four common responses were that Christianity is seen as a white religion, Native culture has been abused, physical and sexual abuse hinder reception of the Gospel, and peer and family pressure from non-Christians keep some Natives from conversion. It should be noted that no Native person I have ever encountered would claim the latter two hindrances as part of their culture. Indeed, they are barriers to the culture converting, but are not inherent to the Native way of life.

### *3. What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?*

The responses to question number 3 were very interesting. The two most common answers were by far music and testimony. Neither of these things are unique to the Native culture, and for the most part, neither of these things are practiced in a way that I have observed linking directly to the Native culture, rather than the Christian culture. Is there a way that the church could link those more effectively? As for Native dance, that is certainly a controversial issue. Many missionaries, both white and Native alike, banned Native dance because of its link to shamanism. Many more missionaries instead banned the practice of calling spirits and tried to Christianize Native dance. Because of this division, the use of Native dance should be used cautiously and with great sensitivity. So as not to cause a brother or sister to stumble, I suggest that Native dance should be talked about before participating or demonstrating and should not be practiced when a fellow Christian is offended by it. Another interesting response to question number 3 is that the use of art may be a unique way that Natives express conversion. I personally know of no ministry that incorporates making Native artwork. Perhaps a unique trait of being a Native Christian could be art?

### *4. What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?*

The responses to question number 4 were not terribly surprising. All of the answers were along the lines of orthodox Christianity. Rather than being surprised at the common answers, I



was a bit disappointed that there were not more common answers regarding Alaska Native's specifically. I had hoped to see that Alaska Native Christians had a somewhat separate identity from Western Christians both in mindset, practice, and in spiritual lifestyle. On the other hand, we are all one in Christ where there He sees no ethnic distinction. I would like to highlight two responses, however. In my observation, surrender and life change as requirements for conversion are not talked about nearly enough. The majority of youth attend fun church events and Bible Camp where altar calls are frequent, yet the youth culture in the Bush is by far more secular than Christian.

*5. What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?*

The responses to question number 5 were quite surprising to me. If you look at the full chart of common responses in the appendix, you will see that there is a very wide variety of answers. Even in the most common answers there is a wide variety. Additionally, many of the responses I received from other questions included answers to question number 5, but because of the sheer number of responses, I chose not to include them to simply the answers slightly. I was also surprised that prayer and God's Word were not mentioned more, as those two are key teachings in the church, however they may have been overlooked as too obvious. Most of the common responses are fairly self explanatory, although commitment needs a little explanation. Commitment specifically refers to the long-term commitment of church leaders. That I was able to come up with a list of 125 people that have had ministry experience within the Alaska Native culture gives witness to the problem of the short-term commitment of many church leaders. A final observation is that none of the answers were things that the church has not tried and been successful at in one context or another. However, few churches are healthy enough to be implementing all of the common responses. To increase conversions, churches need to move inwardly to implement these strategies in order to move outwardly and increase conversions.

### Conclusion

Even though I have written much already about conversion in the Alaska Native culture, I feel as if a great amount more could still be explored. I stated at the beginning of this study that as the Body of Christ, the church should occasionally take a critical look at what is going well and what could be improved. I also stated that I hope that through this study of conversion in Alaska Native culture that whoever reads it will be both encouraged in spirit and encouraged to act.

I hope and pray that this study brings glory to God and will be of some benefit to the Body of Christ, especially in Alaska. As I am no expert in any of the matters in the study, I gladly invite constructive criticism, corrections, questions, or suggestions. I may be contacted at [adam@cyak.org](mailto:adam@cyak.org) or by my website: [www.PolarNewsFlash.com](http://www.PolarNewsFlash.com).

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>2</sup> Henkelman, p. 17
- <sup>3</sup> Savok, p. 42
- <sup>4</sup> McLean, p. 5
- <sup>5</sup> Henkelman, p. 15-16
- <sup>6</sup> Burch, p. 82
- <sup>7</sup> Savok, p. 54-55
- <sup>8</sup> Henkelman, p. 12
- <sup>9</sup> Henkelman, p. 22
- <sup>10</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>11</sup> Haile, p. 66
- <sup>12</sup> Haile, p. 168
- <sup>13</sup> Haile, p. 171
- <sup>14</sup> Haile, p. 221
- <sup>15</sup> Haile, p. 222
- <sup>16</sup> Savok, p. 44
- <sup>17</sup> Savok, p. 56-57
- <sup>18</sup> Savok, p. 83
- <sup>19</sup> Tarin, p. 3
- <sup>20</sup> Tarin, p. 2
- <sup>21</sup> Almquist, p. 131
- <sup>22</sup> McLean, p. 9
- <sup>23</sup> McLean, p. 9
- <sup>24</sup> Almquist, p. 75
- <sup>25</sup> Almquist, p. 74
- <sup>26</sup> Almquist, p. 12
- <sup>27</sup> Edwards & Natarajan, p. 69
- <sup>28</sup> McLean, p. 9-10
- <sup>29</sup> McLean, p. 10
- <sup>30</sup> McLean, p. 10
- <sup>31</sup> McLean, p. 11
- <sup>32</sup> Henkelman, p. 32
- <sup>33</sup> Henkelman, p. 33
- <sup>34</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>35</sup> Henkelman, p. 36
- <sup>36</sup> Henkelman, p. 36
- <sup>37</sup> Almquist, p. 126
- <sup>38</sup> Almquist, p. 126
- <sup>39</sup> Almquist, p. 30
- <sup>40</sup> *Asimakoupoulos*, p. 25
- <sup>41</sup> Almquist, p. 6
- <sup>42</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>43</sup> Almquist, p. 41
- <sup>44</sup> Almquist, p. 34

- <sup>45</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>46</sup> Almquist, p. 45
- <sup>47</sup> Almquist, p. 47
- <sup>48</sup> Almquist, p. 43
- <sup>49</sup> Almquist, p. 37
- <sup>50</sup> Tarin, p. 3
- <sup>51</sup> Savok, p. 123
- <sup>52</sup> Savok, p. 148-149
- <sup>53</sup> Henkelman, p. 12
- <sup>54</sup> Henkelman, p. 39
- <sup>55</sup> Henkelman, p. 41
- <sup>56</sup> Savok, p. 124-125
- <sup>57</sup> Henkelman, p. 39
- <sup>58</sup> Tarin, p. 2
- <sup>59</sup> Henkelman, p. 13
- <sup>60</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>61</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>62</sup> Almquist, p. 18
- <sup>63</sup> Almquist, p. 20
- <sup>64</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>65</sup> McLean, p. 10
- <sup>66</sup> McLean, p. 8
- <sup>67</sup> Henkelman, p. 12
- <sup>68</sup> Tarin, p. 1
- <sup>69</sup> Tarin, p. 1
- <sup>70</sup> Tarin, p. 2
- <sup>71</sup> Almquist, p. 20-21
- <sup>72</sup> Almquist, p. 21
- <sup>73</sup> *Asimakoupoulos*, p. 11
- <sup>74</sup> *Asimakoupoulos*, p. 12
- <sup>75</sup> Almquist, p. 21
- <sup>76</sup> Almquist, p. 21
- <sup>77</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>78</sup> *Asimakoupoulos*, p. 14
- <sup>79</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>80</sup> Carlson, p. 242
- <sup>81</sup> Carlson, p. 200
- <sup>82</sup> Carlson, p. 196
- <sup>83</sup> Carlson, p. 242
- <sup>84</sup> Henkelman, p. V
- <sup>85</sup> Henkelman, p. 78
- <sup>86</sup> Henkelman, p. 153
- <sup>87</sup> Henkelman, p. 108
- <sup>88</sup> Henkelman, p. 111
- <sup>89</sup> Almquist, p. 31-32

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- <sup>90</sup> Henkelman, p. 153
- <sup>91</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>92</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>93</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>94</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>95</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>96</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>97</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>98</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>99</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>100</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>101</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>102</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>103</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>104</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>105</sup> Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska"
- <sup>106</sup> *Asimakoupoulos, p. 18*
- <sup>107</sup> *Asimakoupoulos, p. 19*
- <sup>108</sup> Almquist, p. 34
- <sup>109</sup> Almquist, p. 28
- <sup>110</sup> Henkelman, p. 221
- <sup>111</sup> Almquist, p. 51
- <sup>112</sup> Tarin, p. 2
- <sup>113</sup> Henkelman, p. 229
- <sup>114</sup> Henkelman, p. 221
- <sup>115</sup> Henkelman, p. 43
- <sup>116</sup> Almquist, p. 151
- <sup>117</sup> *Asimakoupoulos, p. 20-21*
- <sup>118</sup> Henkelman, p. 296-298
- <sup>119</sup> Miller, p. 47
- <sup>120</sup> Miller, p. 2-3
- <sup>121</sup> Miller, p. 43
- <sup>122</sup> Henkelman, p. 303
- <sup>123</sup> Miller, p. 4
- <sup>124</sup> Almquist, p. 36
- <sup>125</sup> Miller, p. 5
- <sup>126</sup> Miller, p. 7
- <sup>127</sup> Miller, p. 8
- <sup>128</sup> Almquist, p. 46
- <sup>129</sup> Miller, p. 49
- <sup>130</sup> Tarin, p. 2
- <sup>131</sup> Miller, p. 78
- <sup>132</sup> McLean, p. 10
- <sup>133</sup> Henkelman, p. 183-184
- <sup>134</sup> Henkelman, p. 199
- <sup>135</sup> Almquist, p. 57
- <sup>136</sup> Henkelman, p. 324
- <sup>137</sup> Henkelman, p. 328
- <sup>138</sup> Henkelman, p. 380
- <sup>139</sup> McLean, p. 11
- <sup>140</sup> Henkelman, p. 340
- <sup>141</sup> Miller, p. 143-144
- <sup>142</sup> Almquist, p. 53
- <sup>143</sup> Miller, p. 145
- <sup>144</sup> Miller, p. 207
- <sup>145</sup> Almquist, p. 38
- <sup>146</sup> Henkelman, p. 341
- <sup>147</sup> Almquist, p. 128
- <sup>148</sup> Miller, p. 207
- <sup>149</sup> Miller, p. 208
- <sup>150</sup> Henkelman, p. 347
- <sup>151</sup> Miller, p. 209
- <sup>152</sup> Miller, p. 207
- <sup>153</sup> Almquist, p. 156
- <sup>154</sup> Almquist, p. 148
- <sup>155</sup> Almquist, p. 29
- <sup>156</sup> Almquist, p. 29
- <sup>157</sup> Henkelman, p. 346-348
- <sup>158</sup> Miller, p. 235
- <sup>159</sup> McLean, p. 12
- <sup>160</sup> Miller, p. 248
- <sup>161</sup> Pierce, p. 105-108, 124-125
- <sup>162</sup> Pierce, p. 105-106
- <sup>163</sup> Miller, p. 251
- <sup>164</sup> Henkelman, p. 349
- <sup>165</sup> Almquist, p. 21
- <sup>166</sup> Henkelman, p. 393
- <sup>167</sup> Almquist, p. 149-150
- <sup>168</sup> <http://www.ak-acc.org/accmembers.html>
- <sup>169</sup> McLean, p. 11
- <sup>170</sup> Edwards & Natarajan, p. 73
- <sup>171</sup> Edwards & Natarajan, p. 73
- <sup>172</sup> Edwards & Natarajan, p. 79
- <sup>173</sup> Edwards & Natarajan, p. 83
- <sup>174</sup> Edwards & Natarajan, p. 85

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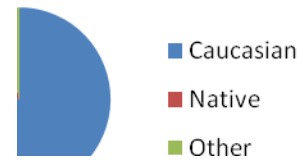
## Appendix A

### Demographics of Respondents

#### *Ethnicity*

Caucasian – 80% (36 people)  
Alaska Native – 16% (7 people)  
Other – 4% (2 people)

#### **Ethnicity**



#### *Gender*

Male – 64% (29 people)  
Female – 36% (16 people)

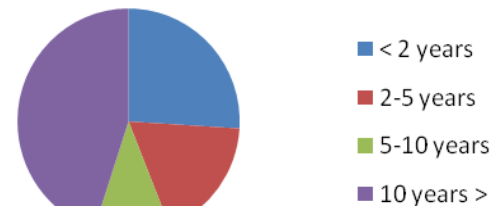
#### **Gender**



#### *Years in Alaska Native Ministry*

Less than 2 years – 26% (10 people)  
2-5 years – 18% (7 people)  
5-10 years – 11% (4 people)  
More than 10 years – 45% (17 people)

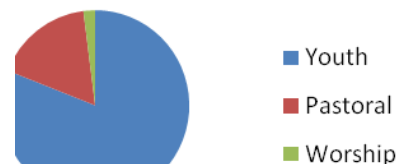
#### **Years in Native Ministry**



#### *Role in Ministry*

Youth/Young Adult Ministry – 81% (33 people)  
Pastor – 17% (7 people)  
Worship Ministry – 2% (1 person)

#### **Role in Ministry**



#### *People Group Working With*

Inupiat – 11% (5 people)  
Yupik – 11% (5 people)  
Both – 78% (35 people)

#### **People Group Working With**



## Appendix B

### Common Responses to the Questionnaire

#### 1. What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	T o t a l
Spiritual Awareness	X			X		X		X			X				X	X					X		X	X			X	X		X					X		X	X			X	X	X	19
Belief in a Provider/Creator	X	X				X														X	X		X						X				X	X				X				X		11
Community hospitality		X		X						X		X			X			X					X		X			X	X	X		X			X				X				X	15
Morality -Common good		X																		X																								2
Respect for Elders				X			X																X						X	X		X							X	X				8
Dependence on the land/Stewardship				X																						X				X	X		X									X		6
God-shaped hole					X																																							1
Differs by community					X																																							1
Faith							X																																					1
Listening							X																			X				X														3
Respect for others							X	X					X										X	X																				5
Reflective							X																																					1
Church history									X				X							X										X							X							5
Leading by example										X																																		1
Relational												X																																1
Needing hope												X																																1
Forgiveness												X																																1
Receptive to the Gospel													X												X					X								X			X	X	6	
Generosity																	X									X				X	X									X				5
Honesty																													X															1
Oral Tradition																														X		X												2
Having hope																																X				X								2
Biblical culture parallel to Native culture																																		X										1
Curiosity and Trusting																																											X	1

## 2. What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	T o t a l	
“White” Christianity	x	x			x	x	x	x	x			x		x			x	x			x						x			x		x	x				x		x		x				19
Culture has been abused		x		x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x					x			x						x				x								x	x					16
Abuse by Priests/Christians		x			x		x																																					3	
Alcoholism/addictions					x								x		x							x				x	x				x					x					x			10	
Suicide		x			x		x																																					3	
Abuse (physical/sexual)		x			x		x															x		x							x								x		x	x		9	
Spiritualism/Animism				x	x	x								x						x		x	x					x		x				x	x				x					12	
Resistance to cultural change				x	x																																		x					3	
Youth-Adult rift				x																x																								2	
Welfare mindset					x	x																																						2	
Poor grieving skills							x																																					1	
“Traditional” church										x																																		1	
Unforgiveness												x																																1	
Lack of leadership												x		x																														2	
Content with sinful lifestyles													x		x																													2	
Spiritual Warfare													x																															1	
Shame															x																								x					2	
Generational wounds																x										x																		2	
Peer/family pressure																			x							x	x				x											x			5
Non-confrontational nature																						x				x													x					3	
Possessions																						x																						1	
Cheap conversion																																												2	
Isolation																																												2	
False pride																																												1	
Biblical illiteracy																																												1	
Media																																												2	

### 3. What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	Total	
Music (Worship)		x		x	x	x	x	x		x				x	x	x		x	x		x			x	x			x				x		x	x				x					21	
Food		x																					x													x								3	
Testimony		x				x	x		x	x					x		x				x					x	x					x	x	x			x					x	x		16
Openness			x																																									1	
Native Dance				x			x		x						x			x		x				x						x					x		x	x	x	x	x				14
Interaction with Creation				x						x											x		x	x	x					x				x					x					9	
New family community				x																				x	x																x			4	
Seeking wisdom from Elders				x																																		x						2	
Dependence for survival				x								x																																2	
Similar in all cultures					x		x																																					2	
Recognizing sin					x						x																								x									3	
Relational sharing 1.on.1							x		x																																			2	
Joy and other emotions										x		x								x															x									4	
Scripture sharing										x																																		1	
Church attendance														x																														1	
Breaking taboos																																												1	
Art																																												1	
Freedom																									x																			1	



#### 4. What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	Total
Place faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior through belief in His life, death, & resurrection	X					X	X	X	X		X	X					X				X	X	X				X	X		X			X	X			X		X					19
Acknowledgement/desire to show fruit to glorify God	X			X																											X							X						4
Christ is the only way		X															X																	X								X	4	
Awareness of spiritual need		X			X			X				X	X			X	X																				X						X	9
Holy Spirit			X	X																			X						X		X									X				6
Acknowledge God’s way is best				X	X																																							2
Getting rid of idols				X																																								1
Relational evangelism				X											X																					X								3
Identity in Christ				X															X																									2
Life change					X									X						X		X			X						X											X		7
Sinner’s Prayer							X																																					1
Repentance of sin							X		X											X			X				X		X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X		X		15
Relationship with Bible									X	X														X																				3
Prayer									X																																			1
Fellowship									X						X																													2
Repeated exposure to Gospel										X																																		1
Encouragement from other Christians										X																						X	X					X						4
Have a relationship w/Jesus											X										X												X											3
Daily follow Christ										X			X			X					X	X						X	X			X	X					X	X					11
Surrender											X		X			X							X					X	X										X					7
Commitment											X																												X	X				3
Freedom																				X																								1
Acknowledge sin separates us from God																	X																											1
Authenticity																X																												1
Discipleship													X																															1
Love others																					X	X																						2
Outward confession												X					X																	X					X	X				5
Accountability																																								X				1

**5. What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives? (Page 1 of 2)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	Total	
Christ, not Christianity	x																																											1	
No Christian lingo	x																																											1	
Address loss of culture	x																																											1	
Teach Christ as Lord	x																																											1	
Preach love/grace/forgiveness	x				x																		x																					3	
Mentoring/discipling		x								x				x	x				x					x		x									x						x	x		10	
More youth outreach		x								x	x								x					x		x	x	x	x					x				x						11	
More indigenous leaders		x							x	x													x	x				x	x							x	x			x	x	x		13	
Make counseling available		x																																										1	
Multi-village worship		x																																										1	
Bible Camp		x																																										2	
God’s timing			x																																									1	
Holy Spirit			x		x																		x					x														x			6
Sensitivity to spirituality				x																																								1	
Acknowledge bondage				x								x												x																				3	
Holistic ministry				x											x			x						x																				5	
Fight abuses				x																				x																				2	
Restoring families				x																				x																				2	
Realize the grace in the Image of God				x												x								x			x		x						x	x			x					8	
Follow-up and incarnational ministry																																											x	1	

**5. What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives? (Page 2 of 2)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	Total	
Recognize the need					X															X																								2	
Being good isn't enough					X																																								1
Relational evangelism					X							X	X	X														X										X	X	X			X		9
God's Word						X				X							X				X	X						X						X							X	X			9
Speak the truth in love							X																					X										X						3	
General leadership							X														X										X		X											4	
Gentleness							X																																					1	
Commitment							X											X										X		X														5	
Lead by example							X									X										X			X										X					6	
Teach that Christ gives dignity																	X												X															2	
Local training																								X																				1	
More small groups																																		X										1	
Earn people's trust																																							X					1	
Create safe space																	X																											1	
Authenticity																	X						X														X	X						4	
Proclaim the Gospel																					X																							1	
Prayer													X	X				X			X	X	X					X		X															8
Relevant Native church							X	X					X				X							X					X						X	X			X						9

## Appendix C

Copy of the questionnaire sent to ministers

### **Perspectives on Conversion in the Alaska Native Culture**

*Thank you so much for taking the time to help me research this topic!*

*Please answer all questions from your own point of view as a leader in the church  
specifically in your ministry within the Alaska Native culture.*

#### Personal Background

How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?

What ministry roles have you had?

1. What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?
2. What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?
3. What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?
4. What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?
5. What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?

## Appendix D

### Questionnaire Responses

*Note: The question about which ministry roles served in has been removed in the version to further protect anonymity*

#### *Response # 1*

Caucasian female working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

10 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Culturally they've had a spiritualness to them. They've believed in a creator in some sense and that all creatures are tied together. I believe this makes them open to spiritual topics more than others who have drifted from this baseness of spirituality.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

The thought that it's an "us vs. them" issue. I.e. If I accept this thing that is of a different culture, will I still be able to maintain who I am culturally.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Sorry, I just can't think of anything here.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

The acceptance of Christ as Lord in one's life and that all is done for Him and to glorify Him.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

For those ministering to present Christ to them, and not Christianity. In some sense our lingo needs to change. There are a lot of bad feelings associated with the word "Christian." After all, those were the people who took away a lot of their culture in the name of Christianity. I do feel strongly that when conversion is presented to someone of a Native culture that it needs to be strongly reinforced that this decision is about Christ ruling in their lives and accepting his love, grace and forgiveness. It's not about agreeing with a group of people who have at times hurt them and their past generations.

*Response # 2*

Caucasian woman working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

1976-present....33 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Importance of community

The common good

Closeness with creation/land

**What are cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Negative feelings toward cultural disrespect by some mission organizations

Association of Christianity with the dominant culture-some individuals carry baggage about this

Sexual abuse by Catholic priests

Alcoholism/suicide/abusive lifestyles

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Music

Sharing of food

Testimonies

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Recognition that life is incomplete without God

Recognition of a spiritual need

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Mentoring relationships

Youth activities

More Native pastors and leadership

Availability of more counseling for Native people

"Get togethers" for worship in larger groups

Strong camping program for children and youth

*Response # 3*

Caucasian woman working with Yupik peoples

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

**What are cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

I think the biggest differences between the two races has to do with locale not the races.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Living in the Bush you are secluded thus you are not bombarded with the media. Thus the people here are not as shaped by what they hear and see and experience from their friends. They are more open to Gospel and they are not as repulsed by it because all their friends tell them it's not "cool" to go to church.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

As far as reaching people, it has to be the Spirit who does it in His time. We can work all we want but God needs to send out His Spirit, and the people have to be open to hearing and receiving the Gospel.

#### *Response # 4*

Caucasian man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

9 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

A sensitivity to spiritual things, community-orientation, a culture that encourages younger ones to listen to those who have gone before, a sense of survival and how dependency upon God is a must

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

History of poor interactions with missionaries or whites in general, shamanism, strong sense of Native traditional religion in some areas of state or with older generations, simple resistance to dominant culture, fear, isolation

A new generation of Native youth that are very different from ones before and the sense of community and care for others and “we’re in this together” is not as apparent as in older generations. There is more of an acceptance of the dominant culture which in some ways may help conversion because of not having the same amount of baggage or a very different view of things that may have been thought of as unacceptable, however it still comes with many negative influences as well and may effect how young Christian Natives live out their faith.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Singing, dancing, unique understanding of Creator and His interaction with creation – a sense of seasons being God-ordained and necessary for life and how to live within those seasons, a strong community-oriented sense of faith, a desire for wisdom from elders and seeking wise counsel from those who have gone before, a strong understanding of survival and dependence upon God for that survival.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

In some ways what it is for everyone – what’s in it for me? How will this improve my life? Also – removing the barriers of other things that are chosen as substitutes for God or at least the knowledge that these things do not bring about a new life or a removal from life as one might first think, evangelism that is relationally-oriented, evangelism that puts deeds before creeds, evangelism that is listening-oriented rather than fact and communication-oriented, evangelism that is committed to the people rather than on making converts, a sensitive spirit keen to the needs of the people and allowing them to be dignified in who they are as a created person of God and to live within that, a strong sense that they are created in God’s image and are beautiful.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

A greater understanding and sensitivity to the spirit-world and that places seem to be held in bondage especially since the arrival of Christianity. That our battle is truly against



those principalities that are at work within Alaska. Also – a true desire amongst leaders to listen and to holistically help people - to listen to the true needs of the person and to speak to those needs. To be about justice – to strive to put an end to abuse and the breakdown of the family leaving many with a sense of failure and poor self-image that causes unhealthy choices. A real sense that God desires to impart goodness into darkness. A sense that the people of Alaska are made in the image of God and that that would be the center of one's self-image.

## *Response # 5*

Caucasian man working with Inupiat and other local Native peoples

### **How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

I have been involved in ministry with Alaskan Natives for around...nine or ten years.

### **What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

I heard a quote from Fred Savok once... "God did not call me to be an Eskimo Christian; He just called me to be a Christian." Like any person, the Native Alaskan feels a hole present in his heart that only Christ can fill. That does not change dependent upon culture.

This is a question that needs to be asked on an individual to individual basis. I have seen Native Alaskans that are so absolutely open to the idea of God due to a cultural background in the spiritual realm, and I have seen Native Alaskans that are so fully brainwashed by the lie of atheism and evolution that they see in science class and the Discovery Channel that it is difficult to overcome that barrier of western "learning."

### **What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

All of the negatives associated with western culture are ever present with western culture often being a crutch... "If it weren't for the white man..." is often said by people struggling with some of those negatives, however, we are not ready to trade back a lot of the conveniences that came with that culture. We are a culture in transition.

We face the struggles of a culture in transition that is using welfare as a crutch. Quite frankly, I believe that welfare is a tool used to keep a people in a lower position. Suicides, alcoholism, drug addiction, abuse, are all more prevalent in cultures and places that depend upon welfare. Why work when the money will come in without the work? Why cut wood when there is energy assistance, why hunt and fish when there is the quest card and store, why find a job when I can get low income housing? Would you work if you were being rewarded for not working?

Then, you throw in some of the problems in the interior that came with the church. I have heard of elders talking of being punished by missionaries for speaking their language, Catholic priests that continue to show up in the news for child abuse, and resurgence in Native Spiritualism as encouraged by the New Age movement and Native Pride.

Yet, you don't hear of this in places like Unalakleet and those who remember the tyranny of the shamans (Nathan Toots) will tell you the freedom that came with the missionaries.

### **What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Conversion experiences are similar in most cultures. When a person realizes his sin, the consequences of that sin, the price Christ paid, and the gift given through that price, he is overwhelmed. This is not culturally dependent.

Like every culture, Native Culture has its own music. Faith is often celebrated through translated songs (on the coast in Eskimo cultures) and with the honky-tonk fiddle music of the interior Indian groups.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

It is absolutely necessary for a person to understand that there is a need to convert to Christianity. Why make that kind of life change... persecution by friends, community members, etc.? A person needs to realize that they are sick and dying prior to getting chemotherapy. Without an understanding that cancer is killing you, it would be crazy to subject yourself to that lifestyle. It is the same with Christianity. Though as Christians we find tremendous freedom in our faith, as the Bible states, the world sees it as craziness. So many times, I have had students ask me why they should ever want to be connected with a "religion" that is a list of don'ts. However, if you realize that you are dying, it makes a lot more sense and you soon find that the don'ts are because God loves you and wants the best for you, like a loving Father.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Conversions will increase through an awareness of personal sin. Jon Edwards saw thousands fall to their knees when they came to that realization. I am not calling for someone to come to the village and preach a Sinner's in the Hands of an Angry God sermon, but sin needs to be pointed out to people and that we are all in sin. It is not enough to be a good person. We have all sinned and fallen short... we need God's grace and it is a free gift given out of love. Too many people continue to believe the lie of, "I'm a good person and so therefore God will accept me and allow me to enter heaven." We need to love people enough to be frank with them... pointing fingers no, but the approach of, "as your friend, I need to tell you..."

## *Response # 6*

Caucasian man working with Yupik peoples

### **How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

I began working with Alaskan Natives in 1980. My wife began in 1976.

### **What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Culture is a strange word. There are the traditional cultural values and the traditional articles written by anthropologists that look at the way it was - past tense. Very few, if any, are writing about today's actual culture. It would be the end of a career in ministry to write a legitimate cultural description of native culture today. It is not what you read. All that said, God is the Creator and thus the One who is over all cultures. Native people coming from an animistic background have an understanding that there is a spiritual aspect to life. When they realize that the Creator is Jesus Christ and not the Raven or some other animal form that has been assigned that role, they realize that a response is required. The western world is infatuated with evolutionary explanations for creation and have attempted to eliminate any supernatural work of God denying His existence. The Native world realizes there is a God.

### **What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

By the same token, animism is demonstrating resurgence. There is a growing opposition to white people and the white man's gospel. Craig Smith, Ojibwe Indian, wrote the book with that title, "White Man's Gospel" demonstrating that Jesus was more native than white. The anti white, anti western, sentiment has built strong resentment. The obvious answer is to send a native man to reach his own people, however, he is often rejected because he comes representing a white mans concept, so that is not always effective. The system has also developed a "give me" attitude. Self sufficiency has been replaced by the welfare mentality. That bleeds over into the spiritual realm as well as the material. So, most expect that someone else is responsible to start the fire, prepare the sermon, set up the chairs, empty the honey bucket, haul the water, etc. There is not a sense that God has gifted us to serve. Welfare is possibly destroying the culture more that any other single issue.

### **What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

If they are in a Pentecostal church they express it in the same manner as Pentecostals. If they are in a fundamental church they express it in the same manner as that tradition. There are some distinctives though - they love to sing. Singing old songs seems to be highly valued. There is a problem in that in many situations though. The song singing is completed as Christian duty and never attaches to life. It is not uncommon to go to a gospel sing on Thursday and be drunk for the whole weekend. True conversion changes lives over time. Many of the adults that come to Christ carry a lot of baggage. Sexual immorality and alcohol/drug abuse have left them with scars that are deep. Much time and patience is needed to work through these issues. Many tears are shed. There is a lot of grieving to do. Testimonies of deliverance from the pain of the past are important, as are songs, yet these then become the focus and have greater influence

that the Word of God. Testimonies usually drift into the bazaar and individuals duel about who has the greater story of deliverance and experience to tell. There is a place for singing and for testimonies but each must come under the authority of the Word. One Native man I know told of a time when he went to a gathering and wanted to share Scripture, but was told they were there to sing and share testimonies but not read the Bible. That of course is an extreme but it is an attitude that carries into most native gatherings. Faith is expressed in experience and not in the Word. I feel this is why we see very few leaders developing - they do not know the Word and are not interested in learning it. A generation ago there were several that dug into Gods Word. There has been a 30-40 year retreat from that.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Placing our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. We have been studying 1st John lately and his opinion is of more value than mine. A recurring theme in that book is that life changes take place after conversion and that is how we know that we have eternal life.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

A desire to know truth as revealed in Scripture. I do not think there is a magic formula but the trend to trust experience must be replaced with a genuine desire to know truth. That is a work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of an individual. I believe that is the same need among American culture in general.

## *Response # 7*

Caucasian woman working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

### **How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

3 officially at ACC, 2 years unofficially at First Covenant Church in Anchorage and through my workplace at Southcentral Foundation, Primary Care Center at ANMC.

### **What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Faith, honoring elders, listening, and respect for others are all a part of their culture. I think Natives are more reflective than those of Western culture.

### **What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Some barriers are the significant amount of abuse they have experienced and/or heard about in those close to them. Some of the abuse even came from Christians.

Grief - the amount of grief people from villages go through is staggering - due to suicide, accidents, natural causes...

If faith is being presented from outsiders I think a barrier is the attitude, "You don't know what it's like." The thought that faith doesn't transcend cultural differences and difficulties, that faith wouldn't apply to Natives.

### **What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Joleen expressed her faith through dance...I think most of the ACC students expressed their faith and conversation the same as other college students would. Elders at First Cov though are slow to speak about personal things and I think their conversion experience fits into that as well. They would tell me over a long period of time, over a long cup of coffee! Some elders share through their music and testimony. I think music and testimony are a big part of conversion and faith, especially in the village churches. I think of the Shavings and how they share their worship music.

### **What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

A prayer to Jesus Christ asking him to be Lord and Savior of one's life, repenting for sin, and asking for the Lord to be their guide, and the center of their lives.

### **What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Actions. People showing them what a real Christian life is like. For Christians around them to care for them, speak truth to them in love - such as confronting sin in a loving manner.

Steadfastness - for the Christians to not leave them, their friendship, their community.

Gentleness - I think enough people are told what to do and how to do it, whether that comes from parents, grandparents or supervisors. But if a Christian is going to join them and try to teach them how to live as a Christian it should come in a gentle way.

Personal testimony from other Natives.

The opportunity to be "fed" on a regular basis. I haven't lived in the village for any length of time...I just wonder how often they have the opportunity to engage in faith conversations or hear from the pastor...some villages don't have a pastor.

*Response # 8*

Caucasian man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

Five years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Respect including respect for authority. Strong spiritual values and spiritual sensitivity.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

White faces being their authority in things spiritual.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

My observation is that Natives have a strong singing tradition.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

For Natives or for anyone? A conviction both that one is in need of salvation and that God will bring them salvation.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Native church/spiritual leadership. Native churches operated in the Native context and setting.



*Response # 9*

Caucasian man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

Five years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

A history of churches in the villages

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

I don't know for sure, so my response to this question is more of a question. It comes from a '6th sense' of my own over the 5 years experience. I also asked a good friend (Caucasian) who was a village Pastor for 4 years about this 'sense' I had, and he confirmed it as his experience also: Do they see Christianity as one more way the white man is saying he has a better way than their culture has provided; if they become a Christian, do they fear losing their culture and their independence to some, or a great degree?

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Through Native dance, telling their story, and being a comfort and strength to each other

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved;" that 'believing' including confession of sin and asking/allowing Jesus to be Lord of one's life, being in fellowship with God through His Word and prayer, and with other believers if possible.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Strong Christian Native leaders among their own people

*Response # 10*

Native man working with Inupiat peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

I have started youth ministry in 1999 and loved every minute of it and started in Buckland Alaska with the youth called "Generation J"

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Unity in the community, the native people in the villages gather a lot for celebrations and that is a good time to share God's word to the people. One more thing that I see in unity is it is done so often that it continues and the younger ones get to see that and continue the tradition.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Some of the traditional values that linger in and some people don't like it and don't bother going to church because of that.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

JOY when there is joy (Joy of the Lord) they rejoice and sing and forget about everything that happened that day and worship God and also when at a gathering they love to speak and always add God's word in there.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

More exposure of the Gospel not just a seasonal thing but a continuance through out the year there have been revivals and big revivals but they die down to me because some people try to do all the work and get burnt out and other members of the body of Christ don't help out enough and the new converts slack off. They need encouragement and help in learning the word they know about unity and gatherings but they need knowledge and understanding of the word of God to continue on.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

More events gatherings especially with the youth and young adults, just as Jesus and The Apostle Paul always did was check on the people after they left a place and the Apostle Paul encouraged them to keep the faith and stay grounded in the word and he encouraged the elders of the church to encourage the younger in Christ.

*Response # 11*

Caucasian man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

13 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

They are a very spiritual people. I have never met a Native atheist.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Some of the early missionaries may have included changing their culture as part of the gospel. Some resist the gospel because of this.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

They seem to be much more open to confessing and repenting of their sins. I believe that that God speaks loudly to them through His creation and provision of living off the land.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

To truly know Christ and His mission on earth and present mission in heaven, which leads to loving Him and following Him.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

A greater focus on the youth.

*Response # 12*

Caucasian man working with Inupiat, Yupik, and other local Native peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

About 8 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Relational- both are relational and you become apart of the family of God

Community minded- look out for the welfare of the community

Need of hope- conflict of culture with the western world has left many Alaskan Natives discouraged and without hope. Jesus offers hope.

A personal savior who know all the pains of being human.

Forgiveness- lots of bad things happen and it is reassuring that you can be forgiven

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Religion is part of the oppressive western culture, reject religion and return to native roots

The concept of forgiveness, hard to believe, accept, and it is not just

Need more native pastors

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

As in other cultures around the world, the spiritual world is accepted and overt in many native communities and it is not relegated to a theological debate. Spiritual oppression may be more overt with Alaska Natives and so the freedom of being saved is really joyful. Also, the feeling of being safe and secure and having someone who will protect and provide is something especially real and tangible

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

A realistic look at your life without masking the pain with drugs and alcohol AND a look at who Jesus says he was and a look at who God is.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Strengthening connection of believers to one another, and prayer

*Response # 13*

Caucasian man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?** 31+ years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Very religious and have been “Christianized” for over 100 years. Humble spirit toward other cultures and receptive to the Gospel.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Contentment with sinful lifestyles, tendency toward alcoholism because of generational patterns, domination by the Western culture, loss of language and culture, loss of control of their own political and tribal destinies, susceptibility toward spiritual forces of satan’s domain they do not fully comprehend.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Very open when converted and had genuine desire to follow Christ, tendency toward hyper emotionalism – the following of dreams and notions of so called faith and not predominately directed by the objectivity of the Word of God.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

An understanding of personal lostness without the saving presence of Jesus Christ, the Deity and claims of Jesus Christ, absolute surrender and commitment to Jesus as Lord, expression of confession into the faith, outward confirmation of ownership of Jesus as Savior.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Having genuine mentors of faith and salvation, hear the Gospel clearly outlined and proclaimed, much prayer to break the forces of satan that continue to hold people in spiritual blindness and bondage, personal testimonies of those who have been delivered who can demonstrate how victorious they are in the faith, more direct intervention regarding personal soul winning.

*Response # 14*

Caucasian man working with Inupiat peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

2 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

There are many cultural tie-ins that align closely with Scripture. One that we have found prominent and is actually central to native culture is that of "honoring the elders." Since God is the "Ancient of Days," He is our "ultimate elder" and is worthy of our utmost respect. To not honor and obey HIM, in reality, is to utterly reject the very core that the culture teaches.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

It is still often seen as either a "white man's thing" perpetuated by the lack of Native leadership or it is seen with the same lens found in many cultures of "appeasing the spirits" to get them off my back so I can do what I want.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Traditional ways of expression have included the singing of songs at church gatherings and "Singspirations" as well as some degree of church attendance. Music is definitely a core part of their expression from my perspective.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

As I understand the Great Commission, our command is not to make converts, but rather to make disciples. Conversion is a surrendering of my will -- to do my own selfish thing - - to bring it in line with God's Loving Rulership. "Take up your cross daily and follow after Me." Disciples are those who are growing and living out their faith as a daily walk with God rather than as just some "religious" exercise. The most common self-descriptive term used in the N.T. is that of the *doulos* or bond-servant.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Having mature Christians to be able to provide a mentoring relationship, yet humble enough to be willing to "love" the people and to get out and do things with them. More ministry takes place Monday through Saturday than ever takes place from a pulpit on a Sunday.

*Response # 15*

Caucasian woman working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

2.5 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Their culture is very spiritual in a sense. Regardless, if it is Christian or not they are very in tune to a 'higher power' or a god.

They are also very family oriented, therefore if one person becomes saved there is sometimes a ripple effect that is seen.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

A cultural barrier that I think many of them face when coming to Christ is that they realize what it means to become a Christian. For many of them it means giving up alcohol or unhealthy habits/addictions, knowing what a barrier that can be makes them easily discouraged, thinking that they are not good enough for Christ.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

One thing is that they love to talk about how they are becoming different because of Christ. They are very sensitive to other's stories and often they are very similar. This can be a great evangelistic tool when winning others. Another, way I think they love to express Christ when they have an opportunity is to Eskimo dance. I may be wrong, but I sense many love to tell their story through dance and worship to God.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Relationships, sharing, and really showing that you care for someone, regardless of Native or not I think this is universal. Showing these people that you want to have a relationship, getting to know them and then sharing meals is huge. I can think of many times Natives have opened up knowing that you want to know them first.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

I think caring for their needs amongst them in their villages. I am not sure what that looks like, but meeting their physical, emotional, and mental needs first are going to make Christian more tangible to them.

*Response # 16*

Native woman working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

Since the early 80s

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

A close connection and understanding of the spirit realm

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

I honestly cannot think of any, except for generational wounds are so deep, conversion is easier if they see examples of authenticity in Christianity

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Alaskan natives and their Canadian and other arctic cousins love to sing

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Being authentic, facing reality, accepting that ONLY God can bring deep inner healing

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Authentic Christians, breaking the religious spirit in the villages, true believers who WALK THE TALK and live it daily. A safe place for people to feel loved, not judged.



*Response # 17*

Caucasian man working with Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

Personally and unofficially about 18 years.

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Man I gotta tell you, I HATE making generalizations about native culture! Because it is so vast and different!

Generosity is huge in Alaskan native culture, and is or biblically should be a huge part of Christianity. Self-sacrifice is also looked on as an honorable thing in native culture and it's something that Christ did for us. But I must say that I feel uncomfortable choosing specific cultural strengths, because native culture today is way different than what it has been historically. There is a huge cultural difference between native youth (who are much more apart of the global youth culture) and those in the older generations. However I think it's safe to say that the two things I mentioned above are still cultural strengths that make Christianity 'attractive' in native culture. But overall it is probably more different for every individual now, depending on how much influence the old culture has had on their lives.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Western culture's abstract ideas, academic thrust, and the categorization of lifestyle in its presentation of the gospel. These are not necessarily all Christian things, but they do often come across in the gospel presentation by western peoples. There are some things that are abstract biblically, but are meant to be taken in a concrete way.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Sometimes they point to concrete things that Jesus has saved them from, instead of talking about what may seem abstract to them. Example: talking about how Christ saved them from drinking instead of hell. But again this is a generalization that I don't feel comfortable in making because it all depends on the person.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

A desire for relationship with God. A belief that you are sinful and because of this sin are separated from God. A belief that Christ's death and resurrection are the only things that can bring you into right relationship with God. And acting on that belief by making Jesus the ruler of your life.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Prayer! I believe that this is the first practical thing to do in any evangelism attempt. The second practical thing I would suggest is making the gospel more relevant to the native man, and to every man for that matter. Men in general see Christianity as a thing for women because they don't see the dignity in holding the truth of the Word of God and leading in the truth of the word of God. Generally speaking men are interested in truth.

And I think there is a huge amount of dignity to be found in rightly holding the truth! Men especially hate getting ripped off, and they need to know that the only way to not get ripped off in life and death is through knowledge of Jesus who is the truth. Truth provides dignity. Native men and men in general, need this dignity. Jesus Christ is the truth. And when a man can stand on the truth and know he is not getting ripped off by the worlds lies he gains a sense of dignity. The truth starts and ends with the word of God. If the average man begins to hold on to that truth he will be able to lead with dignity his wife and kids in a knowledge of that truth. Thus a huge break through in Native ministries can only come when native men gain their dignity in the Word of God.

*Response # 18*

Caucasian woman working with Inupiat, Yupik, and other local Native peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

4 months

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

An emphasis on relationships and community that encourage seeking a relational religion.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

The historical heritage of white religious oppression and the loss of culture associated with boarding schools in the name of religion.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Native songs and dance that are done to the glory of God.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

An emphasis on long-term relational ministry that is patient in its discipleship and consistent in its relationship building. Also, a ministry that emphasizes holistic ministry in which workers are concerned with the emotional, sexual, and physical health of Native Alaskans as well as their spiritual health.

## *Response # 19*

Caucasian man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

### **How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

First of all my involvement in ministry in Alaskan Native culture was very limited. I was up there during three summers and about 6 weeks as resident counselor at AEC one fall. During that time I worked on the staff at camp more as counselor for staff than working directly with the kids. Some of those weeks I spent working at AEC and ACC. My most direct contact with the Native Alaskans was when I filled in at the churches at Elim, Shaktoolik and Unalakleet, but even this was limited. So, with this brief background, let me try the questions.

### **What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

I really don't know what the unique strengths of the Natives would be in this case. Most people that I have known have come to Christ out of need rather than from strengths. Maybe the Alaskan Natives are more honest to their needs.

### **What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Again, I have to plead ignorance. Working with the boys at AEC I got the sense that there is strong peer pressure which has to be overcome to make a commitment for Christ.

### **What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Unique ways they express their faith. I'm not sure it is unique, but I was very impressed with the joy and enthusiasm they brought to their singing. This was true at all the churches I attended, as well as at camp where we came to expect it.

### **What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Remember my limited knowledge of these people and what I say may be all wrong, but, my observation is that all the men and boys that I met (that is Native Alaskan) had very low self images. If that is true, I wonder if that is a barrier that must be overcome before committing one's self to Jesus Christ.

### **What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

What could increase the number of conversions? I think there is only one real way and that is to reach the children. Noting that I was only in these churches during the summer months, and knowing that the summer schedule in these villages is very intense in terms of fishing, berry picking, etc., however, I was saddened to see so many children with no church activity for them. The month I was in Shaktoolik kids filled the parsonage almost every hour of the day if I would let them. They had heard a group from Nome was coming to do a short Bible School-like program. They waited weeks, every day asking if they had come yet. The group never showed up. To be very honest I don't see much success if we depend only on the camp, and thank God for that! As I brought the kids from camp back to Unalakleet and the plane for home I wondered and prayed that there would be someone to continue the encouragement in the faith.

## *Response # 20*

Native man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

### **How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

I would say since I was 18 when I first was a lead counselor at bible camp. So that would make it 16 years!

### **What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

This is a difficult question for me. I'll try to list some things that have come to mind and try to give a little explanation of them in no particular order.

The visibility of the church in the Bush is a factor. Nowadays it's the school that is the community center, but in years past the church was. Most small villages like Koyuk have one church. Everyone knows about it. And it's a Christian church with little competition from other religions and faiths.

I think us Eskimo may also lead most Americans in experiencing God's revelation thru His Creation. I'm talking about the land, the creatures, the weather... nature in general. Romans Chapter 1 comes to mind. God makes himself known to all man thru his creation. We definitely get a front seat on that one.

I think there are still a few families that whether they know it or not do a great job of passing values down the generations. And for the families that know God, Christ-living is intertwined in everything they learn about their culture. God provides the salmon berries, the caribou, etc. Whereas a modern-western model may be to encourage a growing child to pursue a path of their own choosing and end up looking much different than the family they came from.

### **What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Going back to answer #2 in the previous question, that "spirituality" one feels being so close to nature leads many to different findings in faith. It seems there's a huge secular movement among natives funded thru native corporations and such to retain the native culture. But in this they are reverting back to spiritualism that is not of God, but a type that is described in Fred Savok's "Jesus & The Eskimo".

### **What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

I've met this lady (who I can't remember her name) who was Aleut and by herself used her traditional dancing to express her faith. She had been performing solo to music played on a stereo. Sounds cheesy, but I was deeply moved by her expression of her relationship with God thru traditional means. In some of my own experiences, one example is when I took the traditional Inupiat "Bladder Festival" and "Christianized" it. The old way was when a hunter got a seal, he'd cut the bladder out, and throw it back in the water doing chants or whatever, basically releasing the spirit of the seal back into the water so the next hunt would be successful. This one time I got a seal and was moved to take the bladder to the water from which it was taken, and pray to God thanking him for making the world, making me, and making the creatures he provides for our use. It's a form of syncretism.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

I like to use Paul's explanation of the gospel he preached in the 15th Chapter of 1st Corinthians. I believe that explains the freedom from the penalty of sin. I like Micah 6:8... that the Lord requires of me to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Honestly? It's not a cultural thing, it's a spiritual thing.

2nd Chronicles 7:14.

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

## *Response # 21*

Caucasian man working with Inupiat peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

35+ years.

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

High spiritual awareness due to #1 Original Shaman faith in the supernatural and #2 Witness of Creation (power of earth environment). #3 Subsistence lifestyle lives much closer and much more aware of death and human mortality.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Christianity came through another more powerful culture that has brought destruction of Native culture. Christianity is confrontational, Alaska Natives are non-confrontational. Christianity preaches a pilgrimage in this life to a residency in another life, minimizing earthly possessions. Possession of land has become dear to Alaska Natives. In many cases this issue is a barrier to successful Christian living. Litigation, arguments, grudges, contempt, anger and distraction from spiritual priority have been fueled over land ownership issues.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Alaska Native culture encourages and esteems story telling and personal expression in speech and song. This naturally allows for personal testimony of faith and worship in song. Village churches can spend hours at a time sharing in this way. The Alaska State government will allow Alaska Natives to express Christian faith in ways they will not allow other cultures to express Christian faith!!! This expression of faith is seen (by state government) as Alaska Native culture. (Examples: public radio and TV, public school events and governance)

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

One must believe that Jesus Christ is God who came to us in the flesh as a man to live a sinless life, to die for our sins, to rise from the dead promising us the same hope of eternal life. Those who truly believe in Jesus Christ will become more and more like him, loving God and loving people like God does. Any cultural distinctions that hinder living like this must be abandoned. Any cultural distinctions that do not hinder living like Christ should be cherished and maintained.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

The Gospel of Jesus Christ has been in Alaska for over 100 years. During that time the church in Alaska has drifted from its Biblical moorings. Today many Alaska natives (as well as other nationalities) have misconceptions of true Christianity and the biblical function of the Church. Many Alaska Natives no longer understand the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ even though they respect spirituality. There will be an increase in conversions when the local church in native communities begins to live out the power of the Gospel in daily life so that people can witness what Christianity is really about. This

will come through increased investment of teaching, caring and prayer with and for the local village pastors and church leaders.



*Response # 22*

Caucasian man and Native woman working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

(Man's response) 3-4 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

A lot of kids up here don't have a lot of goals for the future or hope. Many of the kids live for today. Although this seems all negative but because of this Jesus just seems that more necessary.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Relatively recent beliefs in shamanism. Alcoholism, drugs and abuse. The latter three things are sadly not really talked about in church. It is kind of swept under the rug. Almost like the elephant in the room that everyone knows about but no one wants deal with.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

For some who have been taught cultural spiritual beliefs such as what you need to do after you catch an animal. There are certain practices that one must do in order to release the spirit of the animal so that one may have favor while hunting. People who have become a Christian refuse to continue that practice or teach it to others.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

At the basic level, to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Once converted one must start to live out in their lives what Jesus means to them. The person needs to live there life out for Jesus making Christ like decisions. Something I feel that is often over looked in conversion is discipleship. People who are bent on just converting people and not discipline them can really leave a huge gap in a new believer's faith. I feel like conversion and discipleship go hand in hand.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Jesus. Jesus is the key to all of this. We need people who are living for Jesus who have a burden for the Native people in Alaska. We need people to pray. Prayer is so important while in ministry. Ones own prayer life as well as a network of people praying for the ministry.

*Response # 23*

Caucasian woman working with Inupiat, Yupik, and other local Native peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

I have been involved with ministry in the native culture for 4 whole months

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

I think one of the major cultural strengths that encourage Natives to conversion is the idea that they have always believed in a higher power and are extremely open to hearing from the spiritual world, in good ways and bad. This is very unlike most of United States culture. So, being open to spirituality and true spiritual work, natives are open to hearing about God. This also winds up being a significant cultural barrier to conversion because turning to the Triune God often means turning away from the spirits/gods that have been present. This is a difficult change/switch and takes significant effort. So, this closeness to the spiritual realm is both a hindrance and a help.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Some unique ways that natives express their conversion is by using images of nature and natural life cycle to discuss their relationship with God. I have heard the salvation process compared to hunting, northern lights, being stuck in the snow...all sorts of things!

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

I believe that true faith that Jesus is the Christ, and died and resurrected, is essential for conversion. I also believe a willingness to be molded and shaped throughout the rest of life is essential. A want for a relationship to continue, not just a fire insurance policy. I also believe there needs to be some sort of acknowledgement about our own sinful nature and knowledge that God is a God of love.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

I'm not completely sure what would increase conversions among natives. I think a major thing would be not being forced to have a white, westernized Christianity. This is certainly a hindrance. If Christ could be seen within their culture, their ways, and their own lifestyle it would be so much better. I also think a much bigger emphasis on God being a God of love instead of a God of anger and wrath would be good. So many students talk about the anger of God toward their sin and brokenness - but many do not speak of how they are a precious and loved child of God. Therefore, healthy family systems could also help this process. Also - native pastors/leaders will help. Hearing it from one of their own is huge.

## *Response # 24*

Caucasian man working with Inupiat, Yupik, and other local Native peoples

### **How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

Disclaimer: I don't know how best to describe this without coming across directly. I mean no harm and no offense and I am sorry to offend any one and I am not a person who knows all the answers. I am where I am in life only by God's grace. These are a lot of sociological and social welfare factors that contribute this question. I know this is a very deep and painful subject and I by no means what to be insensitive. I wished I could do more to help, but your questions seem to lead to overwhelming hurdles the Native community faces in Alaska.

13 years on and off.

### **What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

That many Alaska Native youth have grandparents that are / were Christians and native culture has respect for elders.

They are very spiritual people and connected to God's creation.

They care about others and community.

### **What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Some native people in Alaska use methods of communication that are more observation based, rather than oral. In addition, Alaska Native are not confrontation and some social issues that effect the rate of Alaska Natives becoming Christians are not dealt with like sexual abuse in the family or substance abuse. In addition, strong bond to family or respect for elders or older family members mean that when a youth wants to go to ACC or AEC and the family so no or encourages the student to stay home then the student is likely want to please the parent and not go to school.

### **What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

They love to spend time in community, especially the connection to Native foods, dance, and music. They love Bible Camp and time spent outdoors and they love to have fun with games while in community.

### **What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

God's working on a person's heart. God planting a seed. God molding and helping a person see their need for God and the need to be broken and need forgiveness and a Savior. I believe it takes prayer and it also takes Christians sharing the Gospel in love and action with the lost. It takes the Word of God to be spoken by a witness. It takes the Holy Spirit.

### **What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

More Native Christian Leaders. I personally only know of a few native leaders in the state like Curtis Ivanoff, Nathan Toots (first Cov), and others. Have Native leaders is important to the growth of the Body of Christ in Alaska. For years it seems like Alaska Natives have not stepped up in the church leadership. Denominational schools and seminars in Alaska have closed and have been ineffective or have not been able to help or encourage the native students to be church leaders. I understand have to go to North Park Seminary to work at a church in Alaska is a HUGE hurdle. It does provide training and consistence to the development of pastors.

A cultural revolution in the villages and among the native people. Alaska Native People need to take responsibility to stop the hurtful acts with their communities. For example, many native youth are suffering from severe abuse including physical and sexual abuse, exposure to violence and substance abuse in the home, educational neglect, and mental injury and regular neglect in the home. The youth are engaging in very risky behaviors like drugs, alcoholism, unprotected sex, and there is rampant suicide. Many of the problems among the Native people are not being addressed or really dealt with among the native people. It is so sad, disheartening, and painful. Native people seem to be in denial and part of the culture is not to comfort others. I respect Alaska Natives and their right to deal with them problems. I also understand their a lot of big social problems caused by outsiders and western influences, but Alaska Native people must take a stand and stop what is happening in their communities. The painful effects of these problems contributes to a weak Native-Christian church in Alaska. I don't know how to explain the pain in the native students at Nikiski. Many of them are struggling, failing classes, and very apathetic to education (even with all kinds of assistance) and then that leads depression, drop out, poverty, and low self esteem. Some of the native students who are mixed racially are doing better. In addition, some villages are changing laws to become "Wet" like Bethel and Tyonek recently built a bar right next to the school..

I think a greater emphasize of education and commitment among Alaska Native would help would help in so many areas of life. If Alaska Native people had more education they would be able to have better paying jobs to help lift them out of poverty. It would help them to gain skills in areas in the Western culture and they would be able to advocate for native rights and political standing in the state like many older generation native did when they helped pass laws against discrimination, established the Alaska Native Brotherhood / Sisterhood and The Alaska Federation of Natives etc. I believe that a commitment to education would help Alaska Natives become community leaders and have huge impact on communities. For example, Christian native elementary school teachers and doctors (Nora Ivanoff), accountants, and engineers that could work in the villages and bring income and stability. Hopeful Alaska Natives could be counselors and social workers and help with positive changes in the villages. Hopefully Alaska Native students will go to Bible College or seminary to be trained in church leadership. Then they could mentor, disciple, and build up the native body of Christ. Then have native pastors in villages through out the state.

I believe these are factors contributing to the problems of not a lot of transformed natives who are Christians.

How can Alaska Natives children and youth become Christians and live spirit filled lives if many are raised in homes or communities that lack effective and healthy Christian witnesses? They are live in communities with no or little Christians and they are exposed to a lot of unhealthy lifestyles and circumstances. Most important we need Christian Alaska Native People who can invest their lives into the lives of other Alaska Native youth as mentors etc.

*Response # 25*

Caucasian man working with Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

I have been involved for 10 years in AK village ministry.

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

I don't know what to say about any cultural strengths for conversion. I suppose it would be that there is much less hostility to Christianity in the village as experienced in the school system than there is in the lower 48.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Barriers seem the same to me as anywhere. The world, known as a circle of friends, does not want to see a person give up the "pleasures" of life of drinking and sex and....and to be honest, I don't believe that the cultural expression is any different in the village than in a non village setting.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

The change to Christianity is a change to a new family. The family should end up being recognizable to other family members anywhere.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Three weeks ago a young man converted. He told me he needed to change his life. That statement sums up what is needed to convert.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

I wish I had the answer, or an answer, to what is needed to increase the conversion rate in the village. I also wished that I had the answer to that question when serving in rural Minnesota and in Cadillac Michigan. To a certain degree, the witness of the local church is the answer. However, after 30 some years on earth, Jesus didn't have too many converts, and his witness was spotless.

*Response # 26*

Caucasian man working with Inupiat, Yupik, and other local Native peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

18 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Many values in the various native cultures in Alaska are values that Christ taught. For example humility, hospitality, generosity, sharing with those in need, respect others, listening to wisdom, stewardship of the land and animals.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Western culture has dominated the Alaskan landscape so some native people at times are resistant to pushy white people.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

They share public testimony often at gatherings and sing without inhibition about their faith. Our culture tends to be more concerned with performance.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Trusting and living in the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

1. Adam and Shirleen working along side churches (through CYAK) to help them more effectively reach out to the emerging generation. 2. Adam and Shirleen building-discipling emerging young Alaska native leaders who will reach Alaska and other northern regions of the world for Christ.

## *Response # 27*

Caucasian woman working with Yupik peoples

### **How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

It is hard to define when I began my own ministry in AK. My parents have been active in this since I was 3 months old. Although I wasn't much help at the time, somewhere along the way, as I committed my life to Christ, I became one of the servers, instead of only served. I guess that would put it as roughly over 10 years.

### **What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Native people have very little doubt of the supernatural, and often long ago there are traditions of predictions of a coming missionary that would have a book of eternal life.

### **What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Native people have little doubt of the supernatural, thus it is hard for them to accept that the Biblical supernatural God is the reality above all other realities, not to be appeased or treated as a good luck charm, but to be known. To try to see the old ways in light of the Bible. I have seen tendencies to try to fit God into the old system, instead of accepting HIS.

Another barrier is that this Gospel came in the hands of the white men who also brought oppression and paternalism, so they don't want to believe he could be right in his preaching. They would rather the old ways conquer as a matter of personal historical pride.

### **What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

I knew one person who simply yelled it to the village :) that was unique, however I am not sure that is at all representative of all native conversion. Historically, it was by breaking taboos, thus showing the power of God over the old ways, or by throwing out idols. Although typified as quiet and non-direct, I have seen native young people be the most bold evangelists to their own and other peoples. They are often an example to me as they simply share their hope with others.

### **What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

A knowledge and affirmation of the truth of the atoning death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God, and a request to God that He apply this atonement to the person's individual account.

### **What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

From the standpoint of the sovereignty of God, nothing but the work of His Spirit. How I think that work will look is an awakening of his people to pray for those they know as lost, and for those same people to surrender completely to God's will in their lives to do or say whatever He wants every day.

I believe that God wants to reach both the younger generation, as well as the older. I believe that those called to reach out to the older should, as good stewards of God's call, study the language and speak to them God's truth in their tongue as much as possible no



matter if only the elder's speak that tongue. If I had to rely on my understanding of Russian to grow in God's Word, how hungry I would be and how hard it would be to taste fully the riches of that Word or to ever grow into leadership! We want Native leadership: it is still the elders who carry much weight in the villages, yet we leave them in the cold in our churches as far as leadership and teaching if they cannot understand God's Word clearly! I believe those called to reach an area should study that area's history as much as possible to understand the why's and how's of the people's lives. I believe in reaching the youth that we should not try to make them live in the past, but should accept their struggle to find identity in their own world as it stands. Focusing on reaching them though providing a place where they feel comfortable as a native person, and comfortable as a downloaded generation person is one key. They need to see how Christ wants them to live in both worlds.

That said, a person can fail at all these things and Native people still be reached: that is the power of the Good News of Eternal life - it has its own appeal that rings in all children of Adam and Eve. However that is no excuse for not doing our best to persuade men.

## *Response # 28*

Asian man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

### **How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

I was a youth pastor for about two years before leaving Unalakleet. My main responsibilities were to plan and organize senior high activities and take part and help my counterpart with junior high activities. Since I have left, I am currently working on a project that will take high school students from around the state and start a discipleship/mentoring home for young students to explore their faith in a healthy environment. It will be similar to the CYAK house in Fairbanks that is aimed at risk students who want to grow in Christ and learn what it means to live like a Christian.

### **What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Natives are culturally honest people. Though honesty doesn't always lead to a pursuit of truth I do believe that I have often witnessed this pursuit in my students. Also, Natives are naturally spiritual people. It would be easy to envy the spiritual curiosity and traits that many Natives possess.

### **What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

I believe that CONVERSION itself is a barrier that is seldom understood and often used to abuse the spiritual walk of many natives. Conversion has been misrepresented in the bush far too many times. I have seen many evangelistic ministries role through the villages. Many of these ministries seemed like they were after the 5 cent conversion, raise my hand up after a talk and a prayer, fill out a piece of paper and check the "right" box, and left to fend for themselves till next time. These kinds of "conversions" are awkward and seem to leave people more confused. I believe that the largest barrier for Native conversion is the cultural perception that natives are the fertile fields for evangelists to come and rape them of their dignity and ability to have an in-depth spiritual relationship. I have seen many ministries lack the depth and thoughtfulness in ministering to Natives.

### **What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

I have found that natives are very honest in expressing their faith and beliefs. Although many youth have a hard time articulating it, many of my students wrestled with it. Many of them were able to share through experiences of past and present. It was harder though for our students to idealize faith and future...

### **What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Daily walk; a continual choice. True of any regardless of cultural background.

### **What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Longevity, relational ministry, a focus on youth, and native leadership (In a nutshell). I do have to say (though I am not meaning to imply that you are stating the opposite) that it was never about the numbers for the ministry I got to be a part of. It was never how many students walked the doors or even how many students really seemed to wrestle and grow

in their walk. My goal was never to "convert" students. It was to have and facilitate intimate spiritual relationships with God and each other. Through this, I believe that our students were able to experience some sort of conversion process. I guess when ever I see conversion and number in the same sentence it makes me wonder about how we minister to people and the philosophy behind our role in the conversion process. I think that coming into the ministry there were a lot of misconceptions about what it meant to be a Christian. Many were sheepish because they thought it was too rigid a lifestyle and some were sheepish because their idea of conversion was solely event based once a year at bible camp. So I guess I challenge this idea of increasing the number of conversion among Natives. However, I do want to see the power of Christ make amazing and profound changes in the lives of Natives, as well as the life of myself, my wife, my friends, my co workers, Americans, Asians (holla), Africans, Latinos...

*Response # 29*

Native man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

My first “ministry” position was as a counselor at Covenant Bible Camp when I was 17, the summer after my senior year. So for 21 years!

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

There are many cultural values that have been identified over the years that align themselves with biblical values. But probably one of the biggest cultural strengths is that of hospitality. Natives are accustomed to welcoming someone into their home. This resonates with the invitation we have from Christ, I think, to come to him, to belong to his body.

I think the notion of a creator plays a role. Most Natives would recognize that there is a creator of the world. That notion is a bridge of sorts I think to proclaiming a truth like from Colossians 1:16.

The use of story in the passing on of knowledge and traditions. The Bible is a story – how fitting.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

The value of extended family. People in our culture value the members of their family, what their opinions are of how they should live their life, what kinds of values they have. I think this is one of the biggest cultural barriers, because once someone responds to Jesus’ call to follow him, we must forsake all. This can be a challenging proposition in regards to placing the values of the kingdom over their family, or proclaiming/living out that one belongs to the family of God over their family name.

I wonder if cultural ambivalence is a barrier? “Sometimes I feel that I have to choose to be either a Native or a Christian.” To become a Christian is about becoming “white.” But maybe that tide is changing.

Fear related to ties to shamanism. There is a fear of curses from shamans – not super common, but I have seen this.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Over the decades, traditional expression has been the use of hymns. These have been translated and over the years have been a significant part of expression of faith. I think it is because hymns are born out of life experience and story, things that resonate with Natives.

There are some Native Christians who do dance and use traditional forms of artistic expression to worship God.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

One must repent of their pride and turn and humble themselves before God. I like to frame it with the verses from Mark 1:16-18. “Come, follow me...” So a convert is one who is responding to the invitation and call of Christ, responding to his gift.

The Holy Spirit must be at work in a person’s life. God’s kindness must be shared some how.

God is the primary actor in our conversion. We receive this gift and respond to Christ’s daily call.

It also requires us to pick up our cross daily and follow Jesus. This means that we deny self.

We must clothe ourselves with Christ.

An act of God followed by a humble response.

What is needed is a patient, enduring faith that will daily respond to the wooing and grace of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

That’s a good question – part of the answer partly is dependent upon what you mean by “covert.” I do not believe that it is simply a prayer where we “confess with our mouth...and believe in our heart...”

### **What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

An intentional prayer crusade by the church.

The church being a better example of what it truly means to be human beings made in God’s image.

The church living out the compelling mission of Christ. Loving God....loving our neighbor.

Again, it depends what you mean by conversions. If you are looking for “decisions”, well that’s easy. Get emotionally charged evangelists to come and preach the gospel and offer people a chance to respond by having altar calls. As a Native leader once told me though, “Alter calls mean nothing. They have given false hope to many people.”

I think the church could break down barriers by affirming the dignity of Natives by allowing traditional expressions of art to serve as tools with which we worship God. I think there are some who are hard hearted over some of the teachings. But then this might alienate others. Who knows?! What is unfortunate is that the legacy that is left behind by many missionaries that if a Native is to convert, they must convert to become an American Christian still lingers. I am borrowing language from my education professor at UAF who is an AK Native.

As the culture and society has changed though, this issue I just mentioned is more an issue for those in the generations above me. The story of today’s Native youth is very different. To increase conversions among them, there must be an intentional incarnational aspect to the outreach of the church. People serving as teachers and coaches, and whatever else will get you into the atmosphere of Native youth. You probably need a Facebook account as a part of that effort. (Not really, somewhat tongue in cheek, but somewhat serious too)

Ok, you got me....more contemporary music in church, serve coffee before the service...oh, and doughnuts. Bribe them! ☺

Caucasian woman working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

I've been directly involved since June 2007.

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

One is spiritual openness. The Alaska Native culture was terrorized by shamanism before the coming of the good news of Jesus Christ and had a belief system that acknowledged and respected the spiritual aspect of the world. They also, I understand from Jesus and the Eskimo, had a concept of Agaayun, or The Man in the Sky. Without a philosophy/worldview centered around humans or an insistence on rationality and scientific evidence, Natives have historically seemed much less skeptical and more open regarding spiritual and abstract things. Also, the evidence of God's power dominating over and breaking that of the shamans was very influential in bringing about conversions in the olden days.

Another cultural strength is that, to my understanding, Native culture already prized generosity, sharing, family, community, thankfulness for and good stewardship of the earth, respect for life, endurance, honoring elders, and listening to wisdom, among other things. These values were familiar to them and made sense; they were points of ready agreement with Christianity.

In addition, God had done some "preparing the way" in Native culture before the gospel reached them, as the stories of Maniilaq (sp?) and Egaq (Lily Savok's father) clearly show.

Finally, I think that by now the younger generations have a family history of Christianity in their culture. It was the faith of many of their grandparents and maybe great-and-great-grandparents, and I think this legacy sometimes is of great help in bringing young Natives to Christ.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

I don't think there is anything inherent to Native culture that hinders conversion, per se. There are, however, things that have become common in their culture that serve as barriers: alcohol, drugs, abuse, sexual abuse, sexual promiscuity, and the isolation that sometimes keeps them from experiencing a wider or different community of people who could help them learn about God instead of encouraging them in unhealthy behaviors. Also, now that many village churches are attended only or mostly by elders, there is less appeal for those who are younger. It's very lonely to be the only one your age trying to follow God, or the only one you know at all.

When they leave the village and go to Fairbanks or Anchorage, for example, there is the cross-cultural barrier. Most churches are largely or entirely white; most of the Christians they meet will be white people, not because white people are mostly Christian or more likely to be Christian but because of demographics and the particular challenges that different ethnic groups face (excluding Hispanics, who tend to be Catholic); because many Native college students can't drive and can't afford their own car anyway, it is more difficult for them to escape the often unhealthy environment of campus.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Native people, or most of them, have the advantage over many Christians of living very close to the earth and having a special subsistence relationship with it. Nikki has an adaptation of Habakkuk 3:17-18 by Tonja Woelber that says, “Even when no caribou thunder from the passes and salmon fail to swarm upstream, when blueberries shrivel on their stems and fireweed withholds its rich, pink bloom, though bears prowl hungry over barren tundra and moose stand sorrowful, necks bent to the ground, still I will praise the Lord my Provider who keeps me full in times of famine and gives me strength to face the future even in the hardest times.” That sounds so Old-Testament, so Christian, and so Native to me! Faith in Jesus definitely enhances and complements the Alaska Native lifestyle.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

I think that to begin with it has to make sense. It doesn’t have to be proven, and you don’t have to understand it all, but you have to have a grasp of the truth. You have to realize your sinfulness and your need for God. In almost all cases, you definitely need Christians to bring you to Christ. You need to see something different and better than the life you already know, a new way of living that you want. You have to come to the point where it’s not worth it to go on as you have been and you’re ready to surrender to God’s rule over you.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

An increase in the number of dedicated Christians among them, year-round and long-term.



*Response # 31*

Caucasian man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

Depends on how you want to count it I suppose. Lived in Angoon before Wasilla - and attended Bible camp in Unalakleet from early age - but was first "staff" at bible camp in 2003. I have been involved in some minor capacities since. Was on Church staff 2006-2008 in Unalakleet.

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Honesty - sincerity - an appreciation for good things - i.e. creation, the gifts of the land, family, health, wisdom of elders. An understanding of life and death. The value of sacrifice for another - and lots of love and laughter... oh and good food! How about a meal!

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

The gospel is mostly propagated by whites in Alaska - and whites have propagated a lot of negative things beyond the gospel. There is some backlash against this I believe. The historical stories of creation are from local means - whereas a Biblical story takes the center of the world out of Alaska and puts it in the Middle East it seems...

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Testimony! Tell your story. Retell your story in the light of what has happened.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Father, Son, and Spirit...

If I have to elaborate... I think God uses Christ's Church - and the Spirit confirms this conversion in our spirit's as we learn to cry Abba father and we produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

God's work through Christ's Church which is more in love with God

## *Response # 32*

Caucasian woman working with Inupiat, Yupik, and other local Native peoples

### **How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

I've served at bible camp two summers and currently am the youth ministry intern at First Covenant in Anchorage, where the majority of our youth are native Alaskan.

### **What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Christianity offers hope. It says that all the pain and hurt won't last forever. There will be an end when Jesus comes again. It offers a hope for an end, and a hope for healing as well. Christianity proclaims a God who can heal all wounds and turn our lives around. It offers forgiveness and grace. It is not just a religion for the righteous but for the sick, for the alcoholics, for the addicts and for the abusers. It's also a religion that proclaims a God that is with us in all the suffering. Yahweh is a God who understands, who knows what we're going through, and with the Holy Spirit gives us strength, comfort and peace in the midst of all of it.

### **What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Sometimes the Church in Alaska does not always welcome cultural practices such as Eskimo dancing and spirit masks because of their ties with Shamanism. I was told that First Covenant would not allow the ACC students to come and do Eskimo dances in the past because of the people whom it would offend, which I personally think is a shame. I think the superstition is also a big thing that could fit in this category. I've had a student ask me, "Julie, what happens if you throw a Bible on the ground?" So possibly, some cultural barriers to converting to Christianity would be those cultural practices that are told should be left behind after conversion.

### **What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

I don't know how unique it is, but testimonies are a real big deal in Alaska. I think the value of stories is very high and thus storytelling is a primary way that native Alaskans use in communicating their conversion and what God has done for them.

### **What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

I think that a person needs to ask for forgiveness of their sins and believe that Jesus died on the cross in order that we can have that forgiveness. They need to invite Jesus into their lives and develop a personal relationship with Him. I also believe that conversion is not just a one time event, it is a process. It is something that we do our whole lives, we are constantly converting and growing in our knowledge of him and who he has made us to be. It's a decision that permeates our whole life.

### **What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Well, first of all like Romans 10:14-15 says, "...how can they believe in the one whom they have not heard?" We need more pastors that are willing to go to the villages. We

need people who are willing to preach a gospel, not of fire and brimstone, but of love, grace, forgiveness and mercy.

*Response # 33*

Caucasian man and woman working with Inupiat peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

We were in ministry in Noatak for 4 years, but have since left the community 2.5 years ago.

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

- Their belief in a creator ties strongly to God creating the world in which we live.
- The cultural importance placed on respecting elders, taking care of the community, family and neighbors aligns with God's command to love one another.
- The belief in respecting and taking care of the land and animals in which surround them ties in with being good stewards of what God has blessed us with.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

- The Native cultural background in believing in Shamanism and the act of evil forces in their lives and communities.
- Language expression: the lack of individual's exposure to different terms/vocabulary used to describe the messages in the Bible. It can lead to misunderstanding of Biblical messages and scriptural interpretations.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

- They seem very open to publicly express to others of their walk with Jesus in hopes of encouraging and reaching different generations within the community.
- They enjoy singing and worship.
- At times AK Natives can be very emotional and vocal in their expression of their hearts.
- Some express their conversion through speaking in tongues and quaking.
- They publicly ask for forgiveness when they feel they have sinned against others in the community.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

- That you confess with your mouth that Jesus is your personal Lord and Savior and give your life to follow him. That you also admit your sins and ask God to forgive you and direct your path in life.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

- That the true meaning of grace be shared with Native people. So often we saw people in the community who seemed to believe that if you were a Christian you were perfect and it appeared that they felt that they had to fix themselves before they could come before God. We heard frequently that you were not a Christian if you smoked, drank etc. Obviously as a Christian God calls you to a life of obedience and you want your actions to reflect the changes in your heart, but it seemed like a stumbling block to many. It's not so much what we have done to justify ourselves, but truly what Jesus has done for us through the cross.

- Discipleship seems to be lacking. So often we would see someone commit their life to Christ and everyone would celebrate with them and then no one stepped in to disciple this new Christian. They would be left to figure things out for themselves often leading to discouragement, temptations and straying away from their commitment to God.
- Native communities need to establish more small groups that act as loving community designed to encourage each other in their faith and study scripture together.
- There is a huge need for youth ministry. From our perspective, kids were so eager to have someone love on them, care about them, establish relationships with them and share the message with them. They wanted places to feel understood and invested in and where they could make good choices for their lives.
- Recognizing that the Christian walk is not perfect, that we are all sinners and that each day is a day to live fully for God.

*Response # 34*

Native man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

15 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Living in God's creation - nature reveals God in many ways.

Always knowing that there is a higher being - creator

Wilderness setting as in Moses wandering in wilderness

Shepherd - reindeer herder lots of similar settings as in Bible

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Worship creation verses creator

Spiritism - superstition from past

False pride

Culture relies mostly on hunter/gatherer for survival

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Sins forgiven - removing heavy back pack and load of guilt

Waiting on God for all He provides (seasons of subsistence)

Native culture by nature is conservation statement

Native wisdom unique for conditions (harsh) may produce greater insight for

What Bible teaches.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Recognize Judeo Christian culture is the only spiritual culture that leads to God.

\* Preach Christ before culture (seen-temporal: unseen-eternal)

Recognize sin and all its power. Unbelief=death.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Identify with natives as much as possible.

Eliminate stereotypes introduced by false teachers.

Even poor people have value - we are created in God's image.

Sights and sounds although undesirable too many cultures do not reveal who people really are.

We are nomadic by nature not aesthetic.

*Response # 35*

Mixed race man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

2.5 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

The Alaska Native cultural is a spiritual cultural. Proving the existence of a higher entity is not something that has to be established when sharing Christ.

There is a huge desire for love and hope in the culture. Abuse is rampant and there is comfort in the unconditional love of a heavenly Father.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

There is deep emotional pain hidden behind addiction. Releasing this pain and overcoming the addiction is difficult.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Incorporating their traditions of dance and singing are ways that Natives express their faith. Also dreams are something that are not uncommon in their culture.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

I think understanding the culture and the struggles that Alaska natives deal with is a huge part of meeting Alaska Natives where they are at in life. Also explaining the hope of Christ in a way that connects to who they are and the life experiences that they have had.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Pastors, specifically native pastors. Natives connect better with natives, and when they see others like themselves in positions of spiritual leadership, others are more likely to follow.

*Response # 36*

Caucasian man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

Around 3 years living in Alaska, but I had spent time at Bible Camp for three summers before I moved.

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

I think that the strong focus on community is important. I have been impressed with Christian people in the village and their willingness to serve in any way that they can.

Not as a tribute to themselves, but as a testimony to God and a desire to serve Him.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

I think that there have been some instances of denominations, churches, or individuals moving into villages and native communities with the mentality of westernizing them.

Based upon my own personal reading, this hasn't been as much of a factor in recent years, but there was a span of time where missionaries did not enter native culture, but tried to change their culture. This creates a tension I think with some people's receptivity to the gospel message. Again, based upon some of my own reading, there are some people who view Christianity as a "white man" religion and feel as though they are giving up a part of their culture and assimilating into an ever growing western mentality.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

I don't know that I have a great answer for this. One thing that comes to mind is people's openness to share their own struggles and their story. I have heard many native people share their testimony as a testament to what the Lord has done for them. In this way, it seems more unhindered than the Midwest context that I was raised in.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Believe in the Lord Jesus, that He died on the cross for your sins, and that He was raised from the dead.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

I think that sharing the gospel message in a real and relevant way to people would cause people in the native population to be receptive. I would like to find parallels between native oral tradition stories and the gospel message to see if some of their stories that have been passed down have a connection to the gospel. I think it would also be valuable to use native language when applicable, such as villages that still have fluent speakers.

Also, training up native leaders, both young and old, in a deeper understanding of the gospel message to that they can share with their own culture in a way that is truly understood and relevant.



*Response # 37*

Caucasian man and woman working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

Involvement in native culture: 19 years of involvement

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Cultural strengths of natives' conversion: strong native heritage in spirituality pre-dating Christian missions. Strong Christian influence during past 100+ years

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Cultural barriers: remote locations that have an experiential clash with life on road systems. In some locations weak churches hamper conversion

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Uniqueness's in conversion: singing and dancing in native language. Native foods and traditions are part of the social network. Unusually high respect for elders in the churches and community

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Necessary for conversion: assisting in helping non-Christians to see their spiritual needs especially in social dilemmas including alcoholism and family crisis. Must break the barriers of generational secrets

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

How to increase number of conversions: encourage friendship and trust by active local involvement with love and compassion. Be kind, loving, real and truthful. Emphasis on youth development

*Response # 38*

Caucasian man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

9 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Always have had a desire to worship “something” and the missionaries helped them to understand it was Christ they were to worship. They understand the value of land and sea, as well as sky, and honor these as made by the Creator, God Himself. They also are open as a people to responding to a gospel of forgiveness, love, and grace. Unlike other cultures that are closed to this message (Asian countries for example), this culture seems to be very open to the Good News.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Reminders of missionary failures from the turn of the last century (1900) that the elders will still speak of as a painful time to hear and believe the missionaries’ story. Also, they are under the attack of shamanism (limited) and won’t convert to leave their ancestral worship (syncretism is rampant). Finally, they culturally live in shame. “I am not a Christian because I smoke cigarettes” is an example of why they will say they cannot be a “real” Christian. They have believed lies of their past and history. They need to receive grace and forgiveness in all things, just as I do.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Syncretism- combination of orthodox Christianity and native secular religions. They also use their past traditions (dance, drumming, etc) in forms of worship today to bring glory to God. They continue to believe that while converted, they can fail to express their faith by their actions, whether good or bad. Finally, they find it more difficult to express their faith as they are a quiet people who don’t confront by culture other people regarding their sin or faith. This leads to a very low level of evangelism occurring in my observation among their peoples. Challenging someone to receive Christ does not seem to be easy or natural for them.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

A true ownership of faith by a sinful person who seeks forgiveness and receives grace, apart from works, invites Christ to enter all areas of their life so that they can become a fully committed follower of Jesus Christ. They must confess Christ then as Lord and serve Him as Christ’s call to service and mission are the natural outpouring of the new convert. All this leads to the hope of heaven for all who believe and receive.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Authentic relationships that nurture trust in the one bringing the message of Good News to them. Guilt, shame, and painful manipulation will not work although it is tried

regularly. To see the greatest number of conversions, they need a gospel of grace and forgiveness and less legalism and shame. Only when they trust the messenger, then the message, will they meet the Maker in a significant way. Trust is a difficult value for the Native and we must earn the trust as the dominant culture before they will truly listen.

*Response # 39*

Caucasian man working with Inupiat, Yupik, and other local Native peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

2 ½ years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Lots of Native cultural values are present in the Gospel – hospitality, community, subsistence, sharing, respect for elders. Their values take on powerful significance in the Gospel in new ways. Also, much is changing in Native culture, Christianity is a foundation which is not changing so quickly.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Identity confusion in a rapidly changing culture, many Natives face issues with addiction/abuse which are barriers to conversion. Some Native people have experiences which were horrible in the church, which has played some role in the loss of the traditional culture and lifestyle.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Some have unique expression through Native dance and a deep understanding and Spiritual connection with God thru creation and subsistence lifestyle. God is emphasized as Provider and Healer.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Repentance of sin to God and to the body of Christ. Heart, mind, and lifestyle submitted to Christ and this new found faith finds its life in the Christian community. This involves public confession, relationships of accountability and ongoing commitment to Christ through the church.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

The church doing the hard work of modeling and inviting others to join the Kingdom. More theology and worship contextualized well in the church. Increase training and recruitment of Native leadership. More intentional outreach through culturally grounded subsistence activities (to build relationships).

## *Response # 40*

Caucasian man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

### **How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

Served for 9 months at ACC in maintenance and construction; been to Mt. Village for a week serving community with construction; Mt. Village a second time for a Spring Blast weekend (with you :-); Ministered through fellowship and ongoing friendships. Mainly relational and helps. Also, prayer ministry, one-on-one and intercessory.

### **What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

Influence of elders in communities.

### **What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Religion might be part of cultural identity. In some ways like Judaism. They might feel that converting to Christianity is giving up their identity as Natives. Christianity might be too closely linked with middle-class white America or missionaries that they view positively or negatively. Villages often have multiple churches that don't present a unified Christianity, but instead competition (e.g. Mt. Village; Cov., Catholic, and Russian Orthodox). Or a Baptist church going into Unalakleet that has a Covenant (protestant) church presence already.

Western individualism has basically destroyed (or at very least undervalued) probably the most important aspect of Christianity; COMMUNITY.

### **What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

To convert to Christianity is to enter community and fellowship. Testimony seems to me to be an essential part of this. From what I have witnessed this is something the Alaska Native tradition can contribute to/ influence the rest of us.

### **What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Faith in Jesus' salvation (i.e. death and resurrection), repentance, receiving God's grace and Holy Spirit. God is the one who first pursues us and it is then for us to respond to that prompting. My surface response right now is . . . falling away is different than converting or choosing away. I think as God would allow us to freely choose him he also would allow us to un-choose him. However I think the Bible suggests that genuine salvation in the first place might be in question at that point. This is a big topic that I am not 100% sure about yet and is still somewhat a mystery to me. I grew up believing once saved always saved. As a teen I went to an Assemblies of God church where everyone's salvation seemed to be up for grabs at any given moment. Salvation was somewhat of a light switch that kept turning off if you weren't paying close enough attention. As an adult I feel I am learning much more of an orthodox middle ground that leans more toward grace. Sometimes I feel Protestants undervalue the Sacraments. I'm not sure if I would go as far to say that they are a "means" of grace (e.g. Catholics), but I also think that to the early and historical churches the sacraments have been more than "just a symbol."

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Wow, I feel I am not qualified to be able to answer this. I would need a much deeper understanding to come close to helping on this one. Probably my best answer right now is more empowerment by the Holy Spirit in active believers. The Holy Spirit is the key for everyone.

Like it or not, I think sometimes missionaries get a little too concerned with avoiding syncretism. Maybe this is not what I should think, but I do think it is most important to "keep the main thing the main thing." I do think there are limits, and of course that is where things get a little gray depending on who you talk to. Again I am not an expert, especially on missiology!

*Response # 41*

Caucasian woman working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

Just over a year and a half.

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

I believe there is a strong spiritual component in the culture which gives them a hunger for God and His answers to life questions.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Although strong family ties are generally an asset, for some of our students the negative influence of family can make it difficult to break the cycles of substance abuse and physical and emotional violence and find the healing inherent in conversion to Christ.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

I am uncertain of this. Their music and dance are a part of their expression.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

A vital, living witness to God's grace in the lives of elders and leaders in the villages, maturity in the faith and the education to relay that witness in the context of the culture.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

More native Pastors, trained and educated in Scripture, living out the call of God in their lives.

*Response # 42*

Native woman working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

Since 2003- 6 years

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

It seems like many natives are open to Christianity. They just know that something is bigger than they are and that there must be a creator through the beauty of their land. Many natives have a thankful attitude for example many natives will give credit to God for a successful hunting trip, and because of that connection it is easier to witness to each other. God is providing a real necessity in a harsh environment.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

Not enough local leadership in churches and villages. Bad cycles: unmarried parents, high school parents, single parents, sexual abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, TV and movies with characters showing viewers that it is okay to sexually intimate without being married, music with profanity

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?** Need for sharing their testimonies. I have seen many natives in my village want to share their testimonies with others. That is one of the reasons why church is so long in my village. Everyone has something to say about their personal relationship with their Father, the Creator of everything.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

Realizing that you are a sinner and wanting to change life style that is pleasing to the Lord.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

Spreading the Word of God through mission trips, Bible camp, youth events, pastors, youth pastors, teachers in school and having relationships with “older” Christians. A lot of natives learn best by observation. I believe that older Christians should have an intentionally relationship with a youth or someone young to mentor and help guide them into spiritual maturity.



### *Response # 43*

Caucasian man working with both Inupiat and Yupik peoples

**How long have you been involved in ministry within the Alaska Native culture?**

I have have lived in Alaska for 28 years. My first three years living in Alaska I served as the Minister to Youth in the Anchorage Covenant Church.

**What are cultural strengths that encourage Natives to convert to Christianity?**

I would have to say the strengths of community, spirituality and openness. Alaska Native youth are also curious and trusting. They are searching for answers to the deep needs of their souls.

**What are some cultural barriers that Natives face in conversion?**

A sense of independence is in Alaskan Native culture. There is the sense that if you should be able to make it on your own. That you should be able to not only live a life of subsistence off the land, but that you should also not have to lean on “outside” resources. You should be able to make it on your own.

A more recent barrier is “unrealized expectations” and perhaps “unrealistic expectations” placed on Native youth and young families. The current culture has an unprecedented view into the outside world through movies, television and the internet. Youth grow up watching and viewing “life” from outside that looks glamorous, rich in material things and oh so easy. Their reality is anything but. This cultural split or “otherworldness” leaves them with a gap in reality that is unattainable and unhealthy. They buy into the cultural presentation of the media and find that it is pretty much unattainable in their home village. This often leaves them confused and frustrated.

**What are some unique ways that Natives express their conversion and faith?**

Through illustrative story, through dramatic conversion from the “bottom of the barrel”, through the love of someone close and through the acceptance of an elder or close friend. Also, through stories of acceptance and love at Bible Camp and youth retreats.

**What do you believe is necessary in order to convert to Christianity?**

That they are introduced to Christ in a loving, accepting and supportive manner. That the myths of “white perfect culture” are openly exposed and faced. That the longing of the soul is exposed and explained with Christ as the one who can fill and complete them. And that someone is willing to take the time to share the love of Christ with them while hunting, playing basketball, sharing a meal or simply sitting and hurting with them as they mourn the death of a close friend due to suicide. Further, that someone is willing to listen and explore the deep hurts caused by abuse of alcohol, drugs and sex. It is necessary that someone be willing to share in the pain to help begin healing.

**What do you think could increase the number of conversions among Natives?**

More follow-up and incarnational ministry. Someone there sharing the load and the walking the road. And having more Alaskan Natives as ministers to their own people. An indigenous ministry team would be great!