

Alaska Field Report

January 14, 2016



Since the last report to you, Debbie and I have completed our move to the Portland area. For the time being, we are renting a condo close to the Multnomah campus. We hope to be able to get into a permanent place before too long. In many respects it feels like starting over, but we've done that before. I'm at the Boring office a couple of days each week that does not involve travel.

Life on the Ground

Debbie and I headed north on September 28th. The focus of our three-week trip was to attempt to make contact with each of our staff, finding specific ways to serve them wherever possible. It was a good but emotionally exhausting time. For the future, Debbie would like to limit the time to a single week. While the journey was taxing, her presence was important and valuable. She will be joining me again in February during Musicale week.

LEaD: The new year is half done. Six students are on the Lazy Mountain campus. In a bit of a twist, this year has its first married couple, with a seven-month old son, and a single mom with a three-year-old. Butch is fifty-two and an ivory carver. At least two have vocational ministry aspirations.

The MOU has been finalized with all six partner organizations signing off. Each of the partner organizations was to submit an addendum which detailed the contribution they were making. To date, we are the only group



that has completed this task. While I remain convinced that this kind of partnership needs to be pursued, I also have concerns about the level of exposure that InterAct sustains. Additionally, it feels like InterAct carries a disproportionate part of the load. While we are willing to serve, the question is whether we are truly helping by taking a larger part of the responsibility. That may be necessary at the beginning but seems unsustainable over the long haul. We definitely need the Lord's help as we move forward.

Lazy Mountain: The leadership transition on Lazy Mountain has begun. Doug Prins is willing to do a gradual transition that will be completed next summer. I have asked Steve Horsman to assume the role of director of Lazy Mountain Ministries. Doug is willing to do some volunteer work for us. But, there is a great deal in his head that we will need to learn. With volunteers and additional staff in the pipeline, we will make it!

Airplanes: The existing policy has been rewritten and submitted to Dale. Jerry Casey, currently chief pilot for Send North, was very helpful. A call to Gale provided some historical perspective. A portion of Roy's research and subsequent input was also incorporated.

Village Ministry:

- Port Lions—The church here has been through significant turmoil. Some very divisive events have occurred and the impact on the community is negative and significant. I chose to stay away while the wars were on. It appears now that there is a desire to kind of start over. There is one man who can potentially be a difference maker. He is Native and is the only one who has the ability to speak to both factions. I was able to meet with him in Anchorage in October. He feels a bit powerless and is not at all hopeful. Please pray for Ivan. I believe this church can be a light in its community and a model for other communities throughout the state.
- Chignik—when Dave Hill left, he winterized everything with the idea that he might not be coming back. Sally continues to decline rapidly with her ALS. For now, we just need to be praying for and supporting them.
- Ruby—the Trams are doing well in their second year. They have done a great job of approaching life and ministry carefully. Partnering with people in projects and even ministry is evident. They are very cautious and diligent about not taking over. Love for people is obvious.
- James & Shannon Miller—with the airplane now in service, James is seeking ways to take the ministry of discipleship to the villages. There have been several opportunities to assist in Shageluk, most involving death in the village. James and Shannon want to take their whole family out to Grayling and live there for a few weeks. We've done some evaluating of the property there and work needs to be done. Since we haven't done much with itinerate ministry, I met with Don Ernst. He is willing to meet with James and help coach along the way.

Urban Ministry: There is no significant change at either Fairbanks Native Bible Church or SonRise Community Church. Harry Hafford (Fairbanks) acknowledges that the transition to fully Native leadership needs to happen. But, he questions when that can happen given his bi-vocational status.

Victory High School: One of those odd issues that tumbled into view over the last few months related to Victory High School. Though the school has been closed for approximately three decades, we are required to preserve the transcripts of the students for another thirty years. Currently they are in a file drawer which at one time was fireproof. In a conversation with the State of Alaska, it was learned that there are no specific legal requirements regarding the preservation. They do have recommendations. All the files have been scanned and have been copied to the InterAct server in Oregon. Additionally, they are on a dedicated portable hard drive and have been copied to cloud storage. That should cover everything for the next thirty years.

The Forward Look:

My heart goes rather naturally to the rural places in Alaska. My personal roots are there, and I long to see the beauty of Christ's gospel and love find fulfillment there. This is also where Arctic Missions was born and found life. I believe that there is still a role for InterAct here. But times have changed. At one time, the "bush" represented Alaska's least-reached people. That may no longer be the case. According to the Anchorage Daily News,

"Anchorage is home to more Athabascans than Fairbanks, more Yup'ik than Bethel and more Inupiat than Barrow, the U.S. Census shows. The city has long been known as 'Alaska's biggest Native village.' With new numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau it can now claim, more specifically, to be home to both the largest Yup'ik and largest Inupiat communities." [Mike Dunham, July 10, 2011]

It suddenly hit me that Anchorage and Fairbanks may now contain Alaska's least-reached people.

As the Lord provides the personnel resources, existing opportunities can be filled. On the village side, the opening that seems to be present in Grayling and Shageluk is something we must nurture. There are some possibilities in Tanana as well. On the discipleship side, it seems a natural thing to take elements of what is being developed with LEaD and find alternate delivery systems. We have six students on our campus. Can't we do more by focusing on helping this larger group, the urban Native person? But I'm wondering if a focused effort should be directed also toward those Native Alaskans now living in the city. We must begin with prayer!

I had the opportunity to meet with Brian Schaffer, the Outreach Pastor at ChangePoint in Anchorage in November. It felt like a divine appointment, one that had the potential to be mutually beneficial. They are looking to expand their ministry in-state and are wanting to partner with others. Our meeting was part of that.

And, Alaska Bible College requested a meeting. The observation is that InterAct has a great deal to offer, both historically and looking to the future. As an alumnus, this is a welcome offer if not invitation. We had a conversation the first week in December and they asked that I put some thoughts in writing. Those are included at the end of this report.

Parallel to this is the need to identify and partner with those who will join us in the completion of the Great Commission. It is my intent to begin the process of developing relationships with those who can help. Jerry Crosby allowed me to be part of the Corban University missions conference. The conversations with students was energizing and encouraging. In the end, it is the Lord who will need to convince every prospect. But He just may do that through our intentionality in telling the story. Along the way I've seen that God often works through an informed conscience. I also plan to start working with pastors. Since we live close to the Multnomah campus, some things have begun there. While not living in Alaska has some potential downsides, the upside is being closer to a pool of potential workers. Prayers and suggestions are appreciated in this additional part of my role.

Finally, one of the most important meetings I've had may well have been with a long-term friend. We first met back in 1992 as staff members of a church. In the course of that time, we became very close friends. More importantly, he has prayed for me every day since. He's a different guy. He taught school and was a principal in the village of Selawik for 23 years. He is a man who would rather pray than do anything. He used to take two hours to cover the three miles to work so that he could pray through the city as he drove. Today I asked him to be my primary intercessor, something he consented to do. I thank God for this man who has consented to do the hard of ministry.

In His eternal care,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David'.

Proposal to Alaska Bible College



This proposal is developed with some founding assumptions. The input and partnership of others is valued. But this will happen on the basis of shared values and some common perspectives. The following are important foundation blocks:

- 1. God is our starting point. We will follow Him, guided by His Holy Word and empowered by the Holy Spirit.*
- 2. All people matter to God and it is our privilege to bring others to love and follow Him, not us.*
- 3. The Church, or as presented here, the Community of Christ, is God's beautiful representation of His life here on earth. The form of this living community will vary according to the culture in which it is found.*
- 4. Empowering all saints to serve is our mission.*
- 5. Missionaries are of necessity coaches and servants, not heroes and big shots.*
- 6. Personal, real-life examples of the Christ life are necessary for the process to succeed. Those who will serve in this way are willing to make their lives an open book so that others can see what God's character looks like when it matches up with human flesh.*

The need...

The uniqueness of life in Alaska is obvious. Nowhere is this more fully experienced than in the bush communities. Ministry there is challenging for many reasons. Life itself is challenging. Ministry strategies cannot be "boiler-plated" from elsewhere. While missions have been present in the state for many decades, huge challenges remain. To finish the task of making disciples, a new wave of laborers is needed. It is possible to prepare these servants for potential effectiveness by carefully selecting and developing the right people. This proposal seeks to begin that. While the person of Christ has been left behind in many communities, the beauty and power of the Community of Christ¹, the church, has largely not been experienced. It is to this end that we labor.

The heart of the matter...

The development of a program of study leading to a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies, with an emphasis on preparation for ministry in bush Alaska. Establishing and developing Communities of Christ that will penetrate the culture and remain as the glorious embodiment of the person of the Savior is the goal.

¹ The term "Community of Christ" will be used throughout as a replacement term for church. The intent in this is to be descriptive in the sense that we want the community aspect of the church to be seen and experienced. That is to be lived out with an unapologetic focus on the centrality of the person of Christ in all that is seen and done.

Participants...

In addition to meeting the normal ABC requirements for admission, entrants into this program will be screened based on the following requirements:

1. Love for God and a desire to pursue an active relationship with Him.
2. Love for people which desires God's best for them.
3. A spirit of humility that is willing to enter Alaskan communities with a desire and willingness to learn about living life from those in the community, refraining from the temptation to instruct them in how to live.
4. A willingness to live a subsistence lifestyle.
5. A teachable spirit.
6. Relationship with a mission organization in Alaska that would be willing to assist in placing the student following successful completion of the program and other entrance requirements.

Program components...

Academic:

1. Core requirements are the same as for a BA in Biblical Studies
2. Cultural and worldview studies will be included. Emphasis will be placed on developing an understanding of the characteristics of honor/shame and fear/power cultures.

Internship:

1. Two semesters of internship will be required. They will be separated by at least one semester out of the village.
2. Internships will be completed in a village, under the mentorship of a veteran village missionary.
3. Each semester will have specific academic and practical elements to be completed. A syllabus will be developed for each session.
4. Graduation from this program will be contingent upon satisfactory completion of the internship.

Ministry skill development:

1. Special attention to Ecclesiology and what it looks like in an Alaskan bush setting. An understanding will be developed as to why the church may be viewed in a negative light in these settings, and biblical principles understood and applied in developing a view of what the "Community of Christ" looks like. The concrete examples of what God's community looks like will be examined thoroughly: Body, Bride, Sheepfold, Family, Vine, and Priesthood. What physical parallel would you use in your community to understand and live out what is intended with each of these images?

Principles of cross-cultural church planting will be cultivated. Since some villages have had missionaries and churches for a number of years, attention will be given to developing an understanding as to what can be built upon and then those things

- that need careful dismantling with a view to establishing something that is healthy and possesses greater sustainability.
2. Study and training in conflict resolution and the unique ways that must happen in an honor/shame culture. Avoiding issues or people is not an appropriate way to deal with these issues, yet that is a common approach.
 3. Preparation to help parents learn parenting skills. It is common for children to simply be left alone. A result is that where faith is present with the parents, it is often not passed along to the children.
 4. Skill development in:
 - a. Listening. More ministry doors are opened by listening than by talking. This is particularly true in a Native Alaskan setting where listening may involve long periods of silence.
 - b. Asking good questions. We go as learners. The questions do not focus on the repetition of data, but result in greater understanding.
 - c. Leading studies of the Scripture that allow people to learn from the biblical text itself, not just from someone talking. Learning to skillfully ask questions that allow the participants to arrive at their own conclusions, experiencing the joy of discovery is a necessary skill.
 - d. Developing refusal skills. When people want to put you in charge, how do you resist the temptation to “be needed” and instead, empower others?
 - e. The basics of what it means to disciple others. Learning how to be comfortable by being an example of the believer and not talking too much. The student will develop a clear and workable plan as to what it means to make disciples. Discipleship in this context has a strong relational component, not just an informational one.
 - f. An understanding of death in a bush, Native Alaskan culture. Willing to learn to be undertaker, caretaker, friend and chaplain.
 - g. Skill in working with addiction, recovery, relapse, etc.
 - h. Introduction to maintenance and care of bush related life:
 - i. Wood cutting, chain saw use and care
 - ii. Snowmachine operation and care
 - iii. Outboard motor, boat use and care
 - iv. ATV use and care
 - v. Firearm basics
 - vi. Big game butchering and processing
 - vii. Fishing and processing
 - viii. Cold weather basics—clothing, safety

Relationships...

Because ministry is a relational process, each person will seek a program mentor. The student in the program will enter into a relationship with a mentor who will walk with them

through the entire process. It is preferable that the role be filled by a veteran missionary with village experience. This person will...

- Meet regularly with the student throughout the program.
- Be an example of spiritual maturity.
- Do life with the student.

Responsibilities...

1. Overall leadership and direction for the program will be provided by a team. InterAct's Alaska field director and ABC's president will be members. They in turn will each select up to two individuals who will assist in developing, maintaining and evaluating the program.
2. Conformity of the program to academic standards will be the responsibility of Alaska Bible College.
3. Internships will be the responsibility of InterAct Ministries. Any academic elements of the internship will be coordinated with ABC personnel.

