

## Executive Presbytery's Report February 23, 2018

### 2018 Mission Gospel 1: New Gambell Church and Community Center

I am calling this a "Mission Gospel," because gospel means GOOD NEWS, and this is all good news. However, like all good news, it comes with a challenge. Take a look at this.

We have been busy building the new Church and Community Center in Gambell for the past 3 years. But at the same time we have been concerned, because we didn't have enough cash to get the building up. This is the gospel on this project:

- **We have enough cash and grants to finish the building!!!!** We have three grants available, worth a total of \$900,000, enough to finish the building.
- We started this project by authorizing \$400,000 in loans from the presbytery from the Hillcrest Loan fund, and we have used about \$300,000. If the budget for this project is right, we may be able to pay something less than 1/3 of the loan back by the end of the year...depending on whether actual expenses fit budgeted expenses. **AND that would mean 1/3 less funds left to raise for to pay off the loan!**
- Presbytery is scheduled to meet in Gambell for the October stated meeting of presbytery! At that time, we will dedicate the new building AND dedicate the newly completed, first ever New Testament translated into the St. Lawrence Island Yupik language! **It will be a HUGE celebration!**
- But it will be busy, from now until presbytery time, getting it all done. **It will be a lot of work, but this mission is important, and we trust God to guide us to get the work done!!** To succeed, the Gambell New Building Committee needs your help, and will tell you how you can help during their report later in this meeting.



### 2018 Mission Gospel 2: Intergenerational Arctic Ministries (IAM)—Nonprofit Corp.

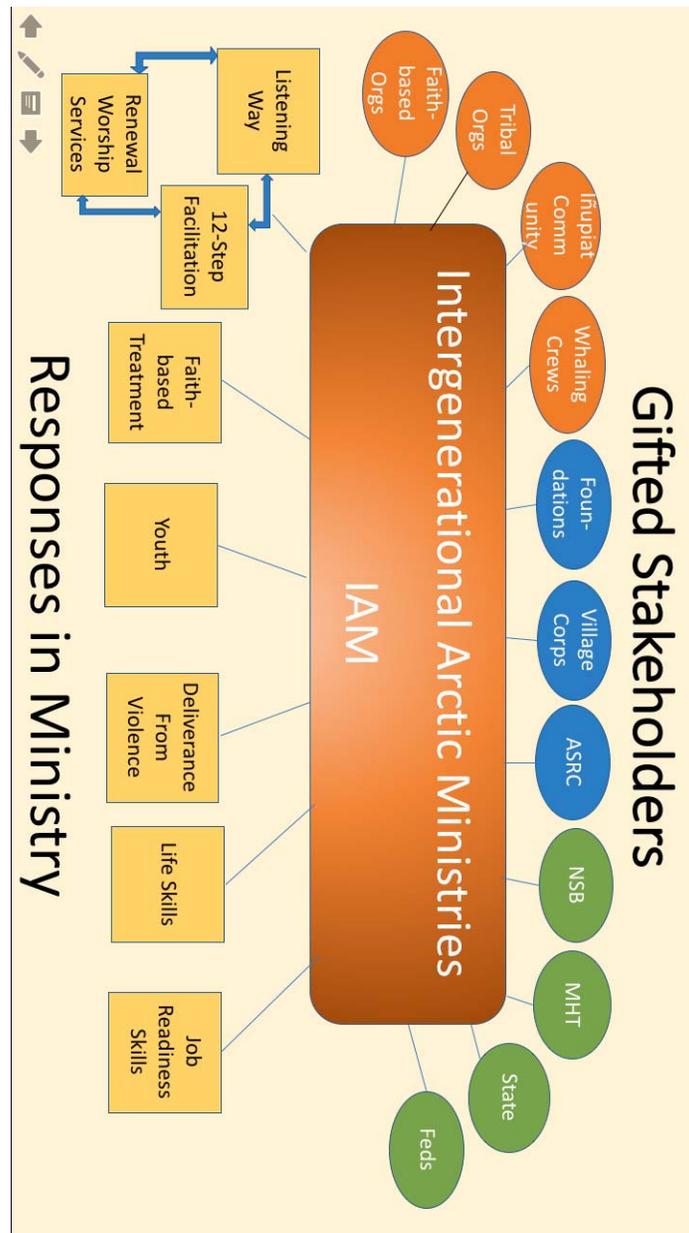
At the October 2017 stated meeting of presbytery, you decided for the presbytery to begin addressing the healing needed due to intergenerational trauma with two votes. First, you voted to endorse *The Listening Way* as a faith-based process for addressing addiction. Then you voted to authorize the formation of a non-profit corporation to partner with churches, with the community sector, with the public sector (government), and with the private sector (corporations) in the arctic. Then you appointed a team to put that nonprofit corporation in place. Much has happened since that meeting.

- In November, the Intergenerational Arctic Ministries (IAM—from *The Great I Am* of scripture) was given its charter by the State of Alaska. Its board of directors includes two

Presbyterians from the arctic: Ida Olemaun and Molly Pederson, two Presbyterians from St. Lawrence Island: Lucy Apatiki and Merle Apassingok, two members from other denominations: Dorothy Bekoalok of the Covenant Church and Rev. David Matthews of New Beginnings Church in Utqiagvik, and Curt Karns from the Presbytery of Yukon.

- In December, the North Slope Borough (NSB), the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC) and Christian pastors related to IAM began visiting villages to introduce *The Listening Way*, and to hold Renewal Worship Services. So far, presentations have been brought to Utqiagvik, Atkasuk, Nuiqsut, and Kaktovik. IAM has authorized Rev. Joseph Reid and me to visit Savoonga and Gambell next week for the same purpose.
- In January, leaders from the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC) and the North Slope Borough (NSB) voiced their intent to authorize \$250,000 each to IAM as pilot project grants to begin this ministry. IAM leaders are currently exploring the possibility of receiving additional pilot project funding from the State of Alaska Mental Health Trust. Attached, you will find a chart that shows something of our mission strategy. At the top are the stakeholders we draw from for resources—with community sector sources in orange, corporate sector sources in blue, and public sector sources in green.
- In February we began working with Frank Damiano, CEO of Global Corp, to design electronic information systems (IT) to be installed in all of our arctic churches. These IT systems will allow live streaming for meetings, trainings, worship services and community events. It is our hope that we may be able to get funding for this through additional grant applications. This would greatly facilitate *The Listening Way* training, as well as many other kinds of work among our churches and communities. We plan to bring Frank Damiano to St. Lawrence Island at a later date to explore whether or not it is feasible to provide this kind of technology in Savoonga and Gambell, since they do not have access to fiber-optic cable, but they do have access to some satellite connections.
- IAM is now at the point where it needs to hire paid employees to do this work. We believe we will have the grant money in hand soon. The first hire will be for an *executive director*. IAM and the Personnel Committee of the presbytery are recommending that my terms of call be changed to allow me to work ½ FTE for The Presbytery of Yukon and ½ FTE for Intergenerational Ministries. This move comes as a recognition that I have been partnering with Rev. Joseph Reid in pursuing the vision and the practical work on this project. That work needs to continue, if we are to bring this ministry to life. Other staff will need to be hired later to actually do the programs we are talking about, but the executive director position and the financial secretary come first.





### Other Work as Executive Presbyter

#### Alaskan Ecumenical Leaders Group

I continue to work with my ecumenical counterparts (bishops, superintendents, executives).

- We are bringing to our leadership teams the question of whether or not to create an ecumenical Lay Academy for advanced education for any, who desire it.
- We are seriously concerned by the amazing amount of warming, and the effects of warming, we are seeing across Alaska. We therefore joined in publishing an op-ed piece in the Alaska Dispatch news last summer, advocating for action that helps Alaskans to be

a part of the global solution. The Yukon Presbyterians for Earth Care asked me to attach it to this report, and so I did.

- The Lutherans and the Presbyterians continue to seek ministries together that address Intergenerational Trauma. We are therefore endorsing a co-training for clergy in Alaska to be held from 6 p.m. on April 24, to 5 p.m. on April 25 in Anchorage. This will provide a first step, in the face of the pain caused when our cultures collided, for considering how we address all of our communities with the promise of God's transformation

### **Pastor to Pastors**

One of my duties is to serve as pastor to the pastors of the presbytery. Although I do not feel free to speak publicly about the pastors or pastors' families I counsel with, I can report that four support groups are now active. I believe these group are very important for the ongoing fellowship and care of our leaders. The four groups are as follows.

- Clergy in the Interior;
- Clergy serving as pastors of churches in the South-Central region;
- Clergy of the South-Central region, who are retired, or otherwise not serving as church pastors;
- A conference call support group for worship leaders in the Native Ministries Region.

This last group began in January 2018, and had its second meeting last week. This is something of an experiment to see if we can provide this kind of caring fellowship by conference call.

### **All Church Visitation**

I have tried to visit each church in the presbytery in a meaningful way annually, and more often when I receive an invitation to do so. I believe this helps me to keep the "big picture" in mind, which is one of the functions I am charged to perform as executive presbytery. This work helps me to suggest connections, so the different members of the church can network together. This work also allows me to assist the Leadership Team in working out our strategy for achieving God's mission, and in interpreting that strategy to others. I always look forward to an invitation from the congregations, for describing our common mission, or whatever service I can provide.

### **Staff Support for Presbytery Committees**

Stated Clerk Sharon Rayt, Financial Secretary Mary Kron, and I are eager to provide support for our presbytery committees and commissions, including attending meetings when appropriate. Melissa O'Malley, or office administrator, also provides support through her communication skills, orchestrating transportation and hospitality plans, and otherwise providing logistical support for presbytery groups. The presbytery committees and commissions shape the direction of the presbytery's mission and strategy, and we do our best to support them in their work.

### **General Finances**

As this report has shown, our presbytery has been very successful recently in securing grants for community ministries. However, our revenues for the general budget have fallen short in recent years, last year by about \$63,000. The Stewardship Committee of the presbytery is therefore looking into ways to strengthen congregational ministry and finance. They are the ones, who brought leaders from the Presbyterian Foundation to this meeting, and for that we are grateful. However, The Stewardship Committee is doing much more besides. Please welcome them when they approach your session with new possibilities to strengthen your congregation.

**Statement from Christian Denominational Leaders**  
***Alaska Dispatch News* op-ed from July 24, 2017**

This statement comes from us as denominational leaders, not from our constituent churches or their members. It reflects our conversations as a group of leaders, and our conviction that this moment is an important one for deciding the economic and environmental ethics of our state.

This is a time to listen to nature, which includes the people. Indeed, when we dare to listen, God often speaks to us through nature. We see this in already in our scriptures: a bush burns and a movement for emancipation is awakened; a new star shines and the Savior is born; a donkey refuses to go forward and so tells us what fools we are, walking blindly into danger.<sup>1</sup>

*“Listen,”* Job 12:7 tells us, *“the birds in the air, the animals on the ground, the plants in the earth and the fish in the sea will preach to you.”* If that was true in Job’s time, it is also true now. This is a time to listen—to pay attention to what is happening to the Alaskan environment.

As Christians, we speak from a faith perspective about why there should be great passion in caring for God’s creatures. We recognize that God has created all things for proper relationship with each other. This message begins already in the first chapter of Genesis, telling us how all creation unfolds, one thing after another, one day at a time. The point becomes clear in Genesis 2:4, stating: “These are the generations (In Hebrew: לְהַאֲרֹת וְתוֹלְדֹתָם) of the creation of heaven and earth, when they were created.” In Genesis, the phrase *“these are the generations of”* always means this is a genealogy, or a description of a family line. We should be passionate about caring for God’s creatures because we are family.

Indeed, the biblical version of the genealogy teaches that humans are the youngest members of the family of creation. As the youngest members, we are tasked with caring for all other creatures, for they are our elders and require our respect. Perhaps this is the best guideline for the biblical *dominion* that humans obviously exercise. We have power for the good or for the destruction of God’s creation; we must choose for good.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, runaway climate change is still not getting the kind of response that is needed. As church leaders who travel across this state, we can tell you that the residents along the Bering Sea know this. Vanishing polar ice is changing the weather patterns<sup>3</sup> in the arctic so drastically that hunters cannot safely get to the walrus, which provide 80% of their protein. They are listening.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 3:1-17, Matthew 2:1-2, Numbers 2:22-30

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:27-30

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.adn.com/article/20150708/alaska-village-ponders-next-steps-walrus-harvests-decline-dramatically>

In the arctic travelers on snowmobiles are falling through ice<sup>4</sup> in mid-winter—at a time when the ice should be more than a meter thick. At the same time, invasive species from the southlands are migrating north so fast our fish and game laws<sup>5</sup> don't know how to keep up. As fellow Alaskans, we know that it is time to listen to what nature is telling us.

The vast majority of climate scientists also know this. They know that 75% of the fossil fuels we already know about must never be developed<sup>6</sup> if we are to have a chance in avoiding the loss of civilization as we know it. This means the nations of the world must be strategic in deciding which fossil fuels to produce and which to leave in the ground.

But Alaskans also know that earth care is only part of what God is telling us. We know that 1/3 of Alaskan jobs and 89% of Alaska's tax revenue<sup>7</sup> is based on oil production. Our social wellbeing is at risk right now, pushing us to develop more oil and gas wells. In Alaska, our people and our legislators, are backed into a corner. We have to deal with the needs of our people today.

Earth care makes sense, because without it the suffering of the people, and of most creatures, will be intense. But the same compassion that demands earth care, and demands it right now, also demands people care. Anything less is ethically shallow and fails to pay attention to important constituent groups with their concerns. As Christians motivated by biblical ethics, we therefore call on our political and economic leaders to act as stewards of creation, and stewards of a just economy that supports people. As others have phrased it, we need a three-part ethic: earth care, people care, and fair share.<sup>8</sup>

In Alaska this means we need an economic plan that provides for our residents while we transition away from fossil fuel dependency. Given the current national political situation, Alaska needs to develop its own plan for how to be an effective contributor to the solution of climate change. Where does Alaska's economy need to go in order to contribute to a good and sustainable future?

At the same time, if new oil and gas development needs to be a part of this transitional time, it should only happen as a part of an intentional plan for transitioning to that good and sustainable future. New development that is not part of a plan for transition away from fossil fuel dependency would be irresponsible, because it would fail to care for the earth in the face of accelerating climate change. Until such a plan is in place, it would be irresponsible to go forward with new development.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.adn.com/article/20141226/man-survives-fall-through-ice-three-days-outside-near-barrow>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/lands/ecosystems/pdfs/climatechangestrategy.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/apr/22/earth-day-scientists-warning-fossil-fuels->

<sup>7</sup> <https://accap.uaf.edu/sites/default/files/Alaska%20Revenue%20and%20State%20Economy.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://deepgreenpermaculture.com/permaculture/permaculture-ethics/>

Alaska is in economic recession largely due to declining oil production, compounded by the current low oil prices. Both of these reflect our dependence on oil for our cash economy. In our view, this requires immediate work for an economic plan to design the transition away from fossil fuel dependency, not new fossil fuel development without a viable plan for a just transition.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Curtis E. Karns, Executive Presbyter, Presbytery of Yukon, Presbyterian Church (USA)

Rev. Shelley Wickstrom, Bishop, Synod of Alaska, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

Fr. Mark Lattime, Bishop, Diocese of Alaska, Episcopal Church USA

Rev. Carlo Rapanut, Superintendent, Alaska United Methodist Conference

Fr. David Mahaffey, Bishop, Diocese of Sitka and Alaska, Orthodox Church in America