

# Snapshot of Nome Community UMC

## Name of Church & Ministry:

Nome Community United Methodist Church & Nome Community Center

## Advance Special Number ('Two ways to give):

Advance #931027 (This is the "Alaska Churches" Advance number. Please designate "Nome Community UMC" on your gift.)

## The mission field / community it serves:

Nome and the surrounding Bering Sea Communities

## Brief history of the Church/Mission:

Nome, like much of western Alaska, was relatively unpopulated when people panning for gold descended in the late 19th century. The town grew to 20,000 at one point. A diphtheria epidemic rocked the Native population in the 1920s and, though many survived, the call of better jobs in the cities, the peak and decline of gold fever and, finally, relocation of Natives helped shrink the population to its current 3,500 residents.

But to understand the church, we need to understand Nome Community Center as well.

Nome Community Center traces its roots to a reindeer-herding project that began in 1906. Mrs. R. H. Young, Bureau Secretary of Alaska, supplied a generous donation to the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Church to establish a reindeer mission at Sinuk River. The purpose of the mission was to preserve and protect the tradition of reindeer

herding. The mission was named the Lavina Wallace Young Mission in honor of its personal benefactor.

In 1911 the reindeer herding project extended from the Sinuk River to Sandspit, a beachfront area of Nome. Two years later, the Young Mission leased the Methodist Church building and opened its doors to the public. Church services, clubs, choirs, classes, workshops, Sunday school, the Epworth League, and recreation programs were among the services provided. The program's diversity even then is what marked the beginning of shaping the mission towards what it would one day become.

The Lavina Wallace Young Mission became Nome Community Center in 1970. Although it became an independent agency, Nome Community Center would remain linked to the United Methodist Church through a covenant agreement with the United Methodist Women, and remains a UMW National Mission Institution today.

Community Church was the result of a 1949 union of a white congregation and a Native congregation. Although the congregation has been racially mixed since then, the church celebrated a milestone in July 2013 when the Rev. Charles Brower became the first Alaska Native appointed to Community — or any other United Methodist church in the state.

### Challenges of ministry in this particular setting:

Nome Community UMC embraces Native cultures and Nome, itself, is a hub for many native villages in the area. While this enriches the church and the setting, there are conflicts that arise when cultures collide and different ways of looking at and being in the world share space. Community UMC, with Rev. Charles Brower as Pastor, is able to bridge some of those divides and provide a safe space for dialogue, fostering vital conversations. Moreover, homelessness and poverty are constant problems in the community, making the church's ministry to children so very important for the whole town. The playground at the church helps as well as valuable community gathering spot for young persons.

Something that surprises most people about your setting:

Because of what people see on TV, they know Nome as a place for Gold Mining and, perhaps, the end of the Iditarod Sled Dog Race each year. And these are both important to the town. They may not know just how important Nome is to the surrounding Native villages and how vital the Native culture is in the community. Along with this, persons may be surprised how the local population spends its summer at family "fish camps" getting their catch for the long winter ahead.

What are the ministries that persons can support financially:

Persons may support Nome Community UMC, its building and leadership. They may also support Nome Community Center.

Story of what God is up to:

On most Wednesday evenings during the school year, a lively group of 20 grade-schoolers gather at Community United Methodist Church in Nome, Alaska, for dinner, church school and hugs from caring adults. In fact, children in this neighborhood consider Community an extension of their own backyards — the church boasts the only playground on this side of town.

Lily Fawn White, mother of a 5-year-old and chairwoman of Community's church council, praises the children's program, called Faith Followers, as one of many examples of how her congregation meets the practical and faith needs of Nome's 3,500 residents. "We are so thankful to have a safe place for the community children to play."

Also, each year Nome Community Center (NCC) hosts a community Thanksgiving meal at the XYZ center. XYZ is where NCC offers hot meals

for elders 5 days/week with transportation provided and meals delivered “meals on wheels” style to homebound elders.

### Praying for this setting:

Loving God, we lift up to you the people and ministries of Nome Community United Methodist Church and the Nome Community Center. We recognize that, in this northern land of extremes, United Methodists are reaching out with extreme love and grace to many who are struggling; struggling culturally, struggling, economically, struggling emotionally. Provide them with the financial and spiritual resources to continue to be in ministry with young and old, Native and non-Native, long-time residents and those who are just passing through. We pray this in the name of Christ, our Savior. Amen.

### How should “outside” churches reach us to be in dialogue about supporting the ministry:

You can reach out to us on Facebook or via email at [communityumc@gci.net](mailto:communityumc@gci.net). Our church phone number is 907-443-2865,

### Do you have a need for work teams...and if so what work could they be doing:

We have utilized teams for construction and Christian outreach. We'd love to be in dialogue with you about how you could bring a team up here .