

Snapshot of The Alaska Conference

Name:

We're "The Alaska United Methodist Conference." While we remain a Missionary Conference in the United Methodist Church, we took "missionary" out of our name in 2008 upon being reminded by some of our Alaskan Native sisters and brothers how poorly missionaries treated Native Alaskans in the not-so-distant past.

Advance Special Number:

Our Parish Partners Advance Special number is #931027. You can give to that number to support ministry in the Alaska Conference or you can give to one of our other Advance Special supported churches and ministries.

The mission field / community it serves:

Alaska is big... really big...with great distances between its regions. While most of the population (and the churches) are on "the road system," planes and boats are required to visit some of our ministry settings. Every community has wonderful geography and wildlife. You'll find glaciers, mountains, coastline, whales, salmon, bears, and many things that are great about the Great Outdoors.

Brief history of the Conference:

Some of the first known Methodist missionary work in Alaska was back in 1877 out of British Columbia. In 1890 the Women's Home Missionary Society furnished money to build and operate a children's home in Unalaska, named for Jesse Lee, one of the early itinerant Methodist preachers in New England. All of this is before the Klondike Gold Rush that began in 1897 and brought more persons — and preachers — to Alaska.

The first Annual meeting of the Alaska Mission was held in 1904.

There were major events that shaped the growth of Alaska, and the Methodist Church. The Gold Rush brought persons. World War II and the Korean Conflict brought military to Alaska; many who settled here after the war. Then the discovery and production of oil with a road that connected us to the Lower-48 brought more persons.

The Alaska Mission became the Alaska Missionary Conference in 1972 and in 2008 it was renamed the Alaska United Methodist Conference.

Alaska Methodist University was begun in the mid-1950s.

A few churches have closed over the years but 27 currently are strong and active. Various ministries have focused on youth, students, military chaplaincy, indigenous peoples, music, health, economics, environment, global relief and general missions.

Challenges of ministry in this particular setting:

Alaska, like any state, has challenges to ministry that vary between its towns, cities, and regions. Of note, our population is very transient and “turns over” frequently. Oil, tourism, fishing, and mining jobs, along with the military, lead to a population that is always changing. Along with this, our pastoral leadership has been transient as well. In the past, clergy would only make a 4-year commitment to Alaska. And now the same things that pull our laity away pull our clergy: needing to be closer to family, high cost of living, illness, difficult winters, or the desire to leave some of the Alaska-specific challenges.

In addition, the rates of alcohol abuse, suicide, and domestic violence rank among the worst in the nation with Alaska often getting designated as the most dangerous state for women by different national organizations.

The large size of Alaska is itself a challenge. Some of our clergy are a plane ride away from other United Methodist pastors, making isolation a

problem. Moreover, it means that the travel budget for our conference superintendent is quite high.

One more challenge is our size. Even though we have 27 churches, our average attendance on a Sunday, across the conference, is only 1842 (for the 2016 year). Many conferences have individual churches that average that or more. Alaskans are a generous people, but we just don't have enough United Methodists worshipping in our churches each week to keep some of our ministries going — and, therefore, we need support from those outside of Alaska.

Something that surprises most people about your setting:

About 90% of Alaskan economy goes through Anchorage. It is the “hub” for much of the state. Because of this, it's our biggest city and it's our most diverse city. Surprisingly, it has three of the most diverse census tracts in the whole United States with three of the most diverse High Schools in the nation as well.

And, while other regions of Alaska may not be as diverse, our towns have many persons who came from other parts of the world and have chosen to settle where the wilderness is just out the window.

Stories of what God is up to:

There are many stories and it's better for individual churches to share. But we'll list a few.

- We have an Alaskan Native pastor serving Nome, a community with a large Alaskan Native community.
- We have our largest church, St. John UMC finding ways to partner with their community.
- We are planting a church in one of the most diverse communities in the nation.

- We're being creative in ministry out in Unalaska with laity taking greater leadership.
- We are a conference that pays all of its General Church apportionments.
- We have a wonderful spirit of collegiality among our clergy and enjoy working with each other for Christ's Kingdom.

What are the ministries that persons can support financially:

You can support any of our churches and pastors through our Parish Partners Advance Special. And we have several missions and priorities that you can find on our website.

Praying for this setting:

Most holy God, bless and keep the Alaska United Methodist Conference as its churches and clergy strive to reach out with grace and mercy to their surrounding communities. Bring your healing. Bring your peace. Bring your wholeness. Strengthen their churches so that they may be a witness to your love and a testimony to your Resurrection in "The Last Frontier." Help them build relationships with United Methodists across the world as, together, we serve as the hands and feet of Jesus in our respective corners of the world. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

How should "outside" churches reach us to be in dialogue about supporting the ministry:

You can contact the Alaska Conference Office by phone at 907-333-5050 or email at alaskaumc@gmail.com. You may also find us on Facebook.

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

We have need of teams for Vacation Bible School, Construction, & Camps.