

# Meeting of Frontiers

## *Religion in Alaska*

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<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/russian/chrelev.jpg>

### **Overview:**

Western religion was formally introduced to Alaska in 1794 by Orthodox priests from Russia. Following the transfer of control of Alaska to the U.S. in 1867, new religious groups entered Alaska. Even today new religious groups are making their way to Alaska, thus changing the religious landscape of the region.

This unit will help students understand the historic and geographic processes of religious conversion and expansion. Students will examine the spread of selected religious groups in Alaska over time. They will examine their own communities to determine the religious makeup and characteristics of their own communities.

### **Grade Level:**

High School

### **Goals for the Unit:**

- Students will examine selected religious groups that have entered Alaska since 1794.
- Students will use geographic and historic techniques to collect, analyze, and evaluate the diffusion and changing landscape of religious institutions.
- Students will demonstrate oral and written communication skills.

### **History/Geography National Standards:**

Geography 1. Students will use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

Geography 17. Students will apply geography to interpret the past.

Historical Thinking Standards: 1. Chronological Thinking, 2. Historical Comprehension, 3. Historical Analysis and Interpretation, 4. Historical Research Capabilities

### **Geographic Skills:**

- Asking geographic questions
- Acquiring geographic information
- Organizing geographic information

- Analyzing geographic information
- Answering geographic questions

**Essential Questions:**

- What have been the patterns of diffusion of selected religious groups in Alaska?
- What did the religious groups bring in addition to their religion?
- What are the impacts of religion on today's Alaskan landscape?

**Vocabulary:**

Religion  
 Missionary  
 Diffusion  
 Proselytize  
 Orthodox  
 Catholic  
 Protestant

**Time Required:**

Time will vary depending on the extent of the research. Approximately two to three weeks of regular class periods will be required for the research and presentations.

**Materials Required:**

- Maps of Alaska
- Poster Paper
- Post-It type note pad
- Access to Internet and Meeting of Frontiers web site

**Developing and Presenting the Unit: Diffusion of Religion Through Time**

**Introduction:**

- Start with an opening question such as what religions are represented in our community? Make a list on the board of all the names students can identify.
- Explain that there are many religious groups in Alaska today, but that was not true in the past. As a pre-test, have the students speculate on when Western religions came to different parts of Alaska, e.g., Southwest, Southeast, Arctic.
- Explain the purpose and goals of the unit.

**Background in Native Spirituality:**

This unit focuses on Western religion in Alaska. However, it is important for students to be aware of the fact that Alaska's Natives had long-established spiritual beliefs. Provide students with a brief outline of these beliefs using examples from the Inupiat, Yup'ik, Athabaskan, and Tlingit groups. Information can be found in: Steve J. Langdon, 1993. The Native People of Alaska, Anchorage: Greatland



Graphics. Also see the web site on the “Crossroads of the Continents” which deals primarily with material culture, but also has information on Native beliefs:

<http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/features/croads/>

- The Library of Congress web site on Native cultures and the Russian Orthodox Church is also helpful: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/russian/russch0.html>

(Image above: Eskimo Medicine Man, Alaska, Exorcising Evil Spirits from a Sick Boy. Carpenter Collection, Prints and Photographs Division (57a))

- The “Alaska History and Cultural Studies” web site contains a section on Alaska’s cultures. An essay on “Shamanism” is helpful.

<http://akhistorycourse.org/>

### **Exercise on Three Examples of the diffusion of Western Religion in Alaska**



<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c33494>

Christianity is a proselytizing religion. It began in the area of Jerusalem and today is found throughout the world. Part of its expansion included Alaska. Christian churches did not just appear all over Alaska when the Russians and later the Americans arrived. The churches started in a few places and then expanded over time. This exercise looks at three examples of the growth of churches in Alaska over time—The Russian Orthodox Church, what is now the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), and the Church of the Nazarene. These three denominations are illustrative of three different time periods of when denominations entered Alaska—the first missionaries (late 1700’s and early 1800’s, late 1800’s, and mid-1900’s.

Data: Dates and places of church establishment were gathered from each of the denominations. (See Appendix 1, 2, and 3.) Students should be made aware of the weaknesses in the data. The point: caution should be used in interpreting the data. Also, double-checking of data, if possible, is very helpful.

1. For the Russian Orthodox Church, only churches existing today are listed. Churches established in communities in the past, but no longer exist, are NOT listed. Thus, the current church listing gives an incomplete view of the totality of Russian Orthodox Churches.

2. Church records are not necessarily complete. Note that there is no establishment date for several Russian Orthodox Churches. The records are incomplete. Thus, there may be periods of time when more churches were established than appears from the listing.

Further, dates given may not be entirely accurate. Interviews with Church of the Nazarene members suggested that in a couple of cases the “official” dates given for the establishment of a church were not necessarily correct. Finally, amalgamations took place within what is now the ELCA. Some of the first churches in Northwest Alaska were not Lutheran, but later became Lutheran.

When were churches established?

Questions on Diffusion:

Before proceeding with the exercise, raise some geographical and historical questions about when the denominations might have expanded and where they might have gone. Some sample hypotheses to test:

1. When a denomination enters an area, it starts slowly and then rapidly increases the number of churches, and after a time, it saturates the area and building slows. In effect this creates a “bell curve” of church expansion over time.
2. Most of the growth of the Russian Orthodox Church should have occurred by 1867, since the United States took control of Alaska after that date. [Note the problem of incomplete data noted above.]
3. Population expansion has been greatest in Alaska since 1960. Therefore, each of the denominations analyzed here should have had their greatest expansion since 1960.

Divide the class into three groups, one for each of the denominations. Have each group make a notation of when each church was established and where it was established using small square pieces of colored paper (different color for each denomination) such as a “Post-It Note”.

Next, make a clear wall space available for the following section. Place signs for the following time periods on the wall space from left to right in chronological order:

“Late 1700’s”; “1800 to 1867”; “1867 to 1900”; “1901 to 1950”; and “1951 to Present”.

For each period, have a representative from each group place a “note” for each church that was established at that time. (Place the denominations one above the other, such as the Russian Orthodox highest, next the ELCA, and finally, the Church of the Nazarene.

Where were the churches established?

Next, have the students place on a large wall map (if possible, or otherwise individual small maps) the location of the churches for each of the denominations.

Optional Follow-up Questions:

1. Plot on a map the general extent of the Russian American Company territory. How closely does the current pattern of Russian Orthodox Churches match the territory of the Russian American Company? (See the Lesson on Russian Colonization for map information.)

2. To what extent have ELCA and Church of the Nazarene denominations moved into rural, predominantly Native communities since 1950? Have they focused, instead, on larger urban communities?

Assessment: Once all of the churches have been located IN TIME (the wall chart) and IN SPACE (the map), have the student groups make charts and discuss the hypotheses that they developed.

### **Exercise on Early Religious Leaders in Alaska**

Introduction: Two people had a profound impact on religion in Alaska. One was Ioann [John] Veniaminov who started in Alaska as a Russian Orthodox priest and later (1867) became the metropolitan of Moscow. The other was Sheldon Jackson, who was a Presbyterian missionary and the first General Agent of Education in the Territory of Alaska.



Veniaminov: <http://international.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfak/igfather.html>



Jackson: <http://www.museum.state.ak.us/Sheldon%20Jackson/sjimages/sheldon.gif>

Exercise: Have students develop reports, either individually or in groups, comparing and contrasting Veniaminov and Jackson. Students should address a set of questions and give a perspective on each person with regard to the questions. They may utilize either a poster-type presentation or a PowerPoint type of presentation. Also, the instructor may wish to have them work in groups.

Sample Questions:

1. Veniaminov started his work in Alaska in the 1820's. Jackson began his work in the 1870's. How were their missionary roles similar or different?

2. Both Veniaminov and Jackson traveled extensively through Alaska. Determine areas where each of them traveled in Alaska and indicate the results on a map. Either use a separate map for each individual or use different color schemes for each one on the same map. Comment on where each traveled.

3. Both Veniaminov and Jackson had a significant impact on the education of Alaska's Native population. Explain how Veniaminov brought education to Alaska's Natives and how Jackson brought education to Alaska's Natives.

4. What other special characteristics are notable in each of these individuals?

Sources of Information:

For Veniaminov, see:

The Meeting of Frontiers web site on The Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska.

<http://international.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfak/mfakorth.html>

It contains a special section on Veniaminov.

The Orthodox Church in America also has a biography of Veniaminov:

[http://www.oca.org/pages/orth\\_chri/Feasts-and-Saints/OCA/St-Innocent/Life-of-St-Innocent-MP.html](http://www.oca.org/pages/orth_chri/Feasts-and-Saints/OCA/St-Innocent/Life-of-St-Innocent-MP.html)

Also, see "In the Beginning Was the Word":

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/russian/s1a.html>

For Jackson, see:

The Meeting of Frontiers web site on American Colonization:

<http://international.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfak/mfakamercol.html>

In particular, the section on "Presbyterian Missionaries" includes Jackson's book, Alaska, And Missions of the North Pacific Coast. Books by S. Hall Young and A.L. Lindsey in the same section strongly reflect the influence of Jackson.

Haycox, Stephen W. "Sheldon Jackson in Historical Perspective: Alaska Native Schools and Mission Contracts, 1885-1894." *The Pacific Historian*, Volume XXVIII, Number 1, pages 18-28. ([www.alaskool.org/native\\_ed/articles/s\\_haycox/sheldon\\_jackson.htm](http://www.alaskool.org/native_ed/articles/s_haycox/sheldon_jackson.htm)).

Tower, Elizabeth A. "Reading, Religion, and Reindeer: Sheldon Jackson's Legacy to Alaska." Anchorage, AK, 1988.

([www.yukonpresbytery.com/histories/sheldonjackson.html](http://www.yukonpresbytery.com/histories/sheldonjackson.html)).

**Assessment:** Particular attention should be paid to the clarity and thoroughness of the comparisons, as well as to the number of comparisons, developed by the students. The quality of the presentations should also be assessed. Below is a suggested scoring guide.

Research and Presentation Scoring Guide

#### Research

- Thoroughly researched
- Satisfactory work completed
- Sketchy and incomplete
- Little to no research

#### Participation in Group Project

- Leading role and much enthusiasm
- Moderate involvement and enthusiasm
- Little involvement and enthusiasm
- Little attention to work and group involvement

#### Presentation: Substantive Material

- Provided audience with an excellent summary of the educational system and its context in time
- Provided audience with a relatively complete summary of the educational system and its context in time
- Provided audience with a limited summary and context
- Provided audience with sketchy summary of the educational system and virtually no context in time

#### Presentation: Performance

- Considerable enthusiasm and clarity in presentation
- Enthusiasm and clear presentation
- Minor enthusiasm and somewhat unclear presentation
- No enthusiasm and little clarity in presentation

#### Comments and Score:

### **Exercise on the Landscape of Religion**

Religious expression is not only seen through its believers, it is also seen on the landscape. In this exercise students will explore and describe the “look” of churches in Alaska. The focus of the exercise is primarily on the religious landscape in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. Students may also wish to investigate Alaskan churches today.

Have students examine churches in Siberia to see what architectural background the Russians brought with them to Alaska. Information can be found in the Meeting of Frontiers web site section on Russian Missionary Activity:

<http://international.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfcolony/colrumiss.html>



<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/wtc.4a02806>

In addition, the William C. Brumfield Collection of the Library of Congress has an extensive contemporary collection of images of churches in the Russian North:

<http://international.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfdigcol/mfdephot.html#a>

For the Protestant and Catholic churches of Alaska during the late 1800's and early 1900's, refer again to the Meeting of Frontiers web site on American Colonization:

<http://international.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfak/mfakamercol.html>



<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsc.02244>

## References

### Maps of Alaska:

National Geographic Society. <http://plasma.nationalgeographic.com/mapmachine/>

Pearson, Roger and Marjorie Hermans (eds.) 1998. *Alaska in Maps: A thematic atlas*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Fairbanks.

**For a general history of Alaska, see:**

Antonson, Joan M. and William S. Hanable. 1984. *Alaska's Heritage*. Anchorage: The Alaska Historical Commission.

Library of Congress. "Development" in *Meeting of Frontiers*.  
<http://frontiers.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfcolony/mfcolony.html>

Naske, Claus-M. and H.E. Slotnick. 1994. *Alaska: A History of the 49<sup>th</sup> State*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

For a culture history of the region, see:

Fitzhugh, William W., and Aron Crowell. 1988. *Crossroads of Continents*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian.

**For Russian Alaska and Russian Orthodoxy, see:**

Alaska State Veniaminov Bicentennial Committee. 1997. *A Good and Faithful Servant*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Black, Lydia. 1980. *The Journals of Iakov Netsvetov*. Kingston, Ontario: Limestone Press.

Oleksa, Michael. 1992. *Orthodox Alaska*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

Russian Orthodox Church. <http://www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/en.htm>

Smith, Barbara S. and R.J. Barnett. 1990. *Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier*. Takoma WA: Washington State Historical Society.

Library of Congress. In the beginning was the word: The Russian Church and Native Alaskan Cultures. <http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/russian/russch0.html>

**For statistical surveys and samples of the history and geography of other religious groups, see:**

American Religion Data Archive (ARDA) at <http://www.TheARDA.com>

Henkelman, James W. and Kurt H. Vitt. 1985. *Harmonious to Dwell: The History of the Alaska Moravian Church 1885-1985*. Bethel: The Moravian Seminary & Archives.

Newman, W.H. and Peter L. Halvorson. 2000. *Atlas of American Religion: The denominational era, 1776-1990*. Walnut Creek CA: Altamira Press.

The Presbyterian Church in Alaska has a web site with much historical information:

<http://www.yukonpresbytery.com/>

**For church architecture, see:**

Hoagland, Alison K. 1993. *Buildings of Alaska*. New York: Oxford University Press.

The Meeting of Frontiers web site also contains information on Church architecture. See in particular the William Brumfield Collection on the wooden architecture of the Russian North: <http://international.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfdigcol/mfdcphot.html#a>

**For U.S. National Standards in Geography and History, see:**

Geography Education Standards Project. 1994. *Geography for Life*. Washington DC: National Geographic Society.

National Center for History in the Schools. 1996. *National Standards for History*, Basic Edition. Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools.

## APPENDIX

Table 1. Russian Orthodox churches in Alaska in 2002

Table 2. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Alaska churches in Alaska in 2002

Table 3. Church of the Nazarene churches in Alaska in 2002

Blank Map of Alaska

**Table 1. Russian Orthodox Churches in Alaska**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Church Name</b>
1794	Kodiak	Holy Resurrection Church
1805	Spruce Island	Ss Sergius and Herman of Valaam Chapel
1824	Unalaska	Church of the Holy Ascension
1825	Atka	St. Nicholas Chapel
1830	St. Paul	St. Paul Church
1833	St. George	St. George Church
1843	Sitka	St. Michael Cathedral
1843	Russian Mission	Elevation of the Holy Cross Church
1846	Kenai	Church of the Assumption of the Virgin
1846	Ninilchik	Transfiguration of Our Lord Chapel
1849	Ouzinki	Nativity of Our Lord Church
1870	Eklutna	St. Nicholas Church
1870	Nanwalek	SsSergius and Herman of Valaam Chapel
1870	Kolignak	St. Michael the Archangel Chapel
1878	Akutan	St. Alexander Nevsky Chapel
1888	Karluk	Ascension of Our Lord Chapel
1890	Nondalton	St. Nicholas Chapel
1891	Chuathbaluk	St. Sergius Chapel
1891	Seldovia	St. Nicholas Church
1891	Old Harbor	Three Saints Church
1894	Juneau	St. Nicholas Church
1908	Ekuk	St. Nicholas Chapel
1912	Naknek	St. John the Baptist Chapel
1912	Pilot Point	St. Nicholas Church
1915	Nikolai	St. Nicholas Chapel
1920	Lime Village	Ss. Constantine & Helen Chapel
1924	Perryville	St. John the Theologian Church
1925	Sleetmute	Ss. Peter and Paul Chapel
1925	Cordova	St. Michael the Archangel Church
1926	Akhiok	Protection of the Theotokos Chapel
1929	Angoon	St. John the Baptist Church
1929	Hoonah	St. Nicholas Church
1930	Nikolski	St. Nicholas Church
1935	Napaskiak	St. Jacob Church

1935	Kwethluk	St. Nicholas Church
1936	Lower Kalskag	St. Seraphim Chapel
1936	Sand Point	St. Nicholas Chapel
1937	Levelock	Protection of the Virgin Mary Church
1938	Aleknagik	Holy Resurrection Chapel
1942	New Stuyahok	St. Sergius Chapel
1944	Aniak	Protection of the Theotokos Chapel
1945	Pedro Bay	St. Nicholas Chapel
1946	Nunapitchuk	Presentation of the Theotokos Chapel
1953	Kasigluk	Holy Trinity Church
1955	Pilot Station	Transfiguration of Our Lord Chapel
1958	Eek	St. Michael the Archangel Church
1960	Marshall	St. Michael Church
1961	Chignik Lake	St. Nicholas Chapel
1964	Port Lions	Nativity of the Theotokos Chapel
1964	Portage Creek	St. Basil Church
1967	Anchorage	St. Innocent Cathedral
1968	Bethel	St. Sophia Church
1974	Atmartluak	St. Herman of Alaska Chapel
1975	Fairbanks	St. Herman Church
1975	Kwigillingok	St. Michael Church
1986	Chenega Bay	Nativity of the Theotokos Chapel
1986	Larsen Bay	St. Herman Chapel
1987	King Cove	St. Herman Church
1988	Stony River	St. Herman Chapel
1991	Anchorage	Holy Trinity Chapel
1996	Adak	St. Innocent Chapel
ND*	Crooked Creek	St. Nicholas Church
ND*	Dillingham	St. Seraphim of Sarov Church
ND*	Egegik	Transfiguration of Our Lord Chapel
ND*	Ekwok	St. John Chapel
ND*	False Pass	St. Nicholas Chapel
ND*	Igiugig	St. Nicholas Chapel
ND*	Kokhonak	Ss. Peter and Paul Church
ND*	Kongiganak	St. Gabriel Church
ND*	Mountain Village	St. Peter the Aleut Church
ND*	Newhalen	Transfiguration of Our Lord Church
ND*	Pitka's Point	Ss. Peter and Paul Chapel
ND*	Port Graham	St. Herman of Alaska Church
ND*	Port Heiden	St. Agaphia Church
ND*	South Naknek	Elevation of the Holy Cross Church
ND*	Tatitlek	St. Nicholas Church
ND*	Tyonek	St. Nicholas Church

\* ND: No date is recorded for the founding of the church.

Sources:

Diocese of Alaska. 2002. Saint Innocent Orthodox Christian Cathedral, Anchorage, AK.  
 Hoagland, Alison. 1993. Buildings of Alaska. New York: Oxford University Press.  
 Note: The list refers only to existing churches. Dates for some churches are approximate.

Table 2. Evangelical Lutheran Church of America in Alaska

<b>Year Founded</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Church Name</b>
1840	Sitka	Sitka Lutheran
1894	Brevig Mission	Brevig Memorial Lutheran
1894	Teller	Teller Lutheran
1913	Petersburg	Petersburg Lutheran
1925	Ketchikan	First Lutheran
1926	Juneau	Resurrection Lutheran
1930	Shishmaref	Shishmaref Lutheran
1944	Anchorage	Central Lutheran
1944	Fairbanks	Fairbanks Lutheran
1948	Seward	Resurrection Lutheran
1954	Nome	Our Savior Lutheran
1956	Anchorage	Lutheran Church of Hope
1960	Anchorage	St. Mark Lutheran
1962	Soldotna	Christ Lutheran
1966	Anchorage	Gloria Dei Lutheran
1968	Wrangell	Island of Faith Lutheran
1969	Kodiak	St. Paul Lutheran
1973	Anchorage	Alaska Native Lutheran
1973	Wales	Thornton Memorial Lutheran
1974	Anchorage	Amazing Grace Lutheran
1975	Eagle River	Joy Lutheran
1975	North Pole	Lord of Life Lutheran
1976	Fairbanks	Christ Lutheran
1978	Anchorage	Christ Our Savior Lutheran
1978	Valdez	Epiphany Lutheran
1978	Wasilla	Good Shepard Lutheran
1985	Juneau	Shepard of the Valley Lutheran
1985	Palmer	Trinity Lutheran
1988	Dillingham	Dillingham Trinity Lutheran
1992	Peters Creek	St. Luke Lutheran
1996	Delta Junction	Faith Lutheran

Source: Evangelical Lutheran Church Alaska. 2002. Anchorage, AK.

**TABLE 3. Church of the Nazarene in Alaska.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Church</b>
1936	Fairbanks	Fairbanks First
1945	Nome	Nome
1951	Seward	Seward
1953	Ketchikan	Ketchikan
1954	Fairbanks	Fairbanks Totem Park
1954	Juneau	Juneau
1955	Anchorage	Anchorage First
1956	Sitka	Sitka
1957	Anchorage	Anchorage Hillcrest
1967	Soldotna	Soldotna
1970	Anchorage	Anchorage Jewel Lake
1971	Eagle River	Eagle River
1975	Kodiak	Kodiak
1975	North Pole	North Pole
1977	Wasilla Lake	Wasilla Lake
1979	Anchor Point	Anchor Point
1979	Two Rivers	Two Rivers
1981	Nikiski	Nikiski
1982	Valdez	Valdez
1986	Palmer	Palmer
1987	Anchorage	Anch Chapel of the Cross
1987	Homer	Homer
1988	Anchorage	Anch Chinese Gospel

Source: Alaska District Office, Church of the Nazarene. 2002. Anchorage, AK.



# ALASKA

