

# Thoughts on moving to Alaska...

By Andrew Allen

I have not yet dug into the history of Alaskan missions. No doubt it will be an important and interesting part of understanding the church in Alaska. Until then, I can only go by what a missionary friend told me on one of my early scouting trips to the Kenai Peninsula. Apparently, the early Alaskan mission effort was a multi-denominational partnership that involved splitting up the territory based upon each denomination's initial sphere of influence. Early Presbyterian efforts were focused on the northern arctic regions of Alaska.



One of the first Presbyterian missions was established at Barrow in 1890. Barrow is the northernmost community in the United States with average yearly temperature ranging from -21° to 47°F (it is rarely below -37° or above 59°F). It is doubtful that these often freezing temperatures accounted for the Presbyterian's early influence (with their preference for pouring / sprinkling over immersion) in the arctic

regions; however, their barren and relatively unfruitful mission field may explain why it is so hard to find Presbyterian communities in the more hospitable regions like the Kenai Peninsula. The Peninsula experiences mild summers and relatively warm winters for its northern latitude. January temperatures range from 6° to 24° F while July temperatures average from 45° to 66°F.



In light of this short Alaskan missions history, part of the excitement of planting a Presbyterian church in the Peninsula comes from our anticipation of becoming what most Alaskan residents appear to be - pioneers. To the best of my knowledge, there is not a Presbyterian Church (evangelical or otherwise) making disciples in the Kenai Peninsula. Likewise, on a statewide level, this new plant will be joining with the remarkably small Reformed community in Alaska - the number of evangelical Reformed churches can be counted on one hand.

Amy and I were committed to following the gospel call to wherever it might take us. I had applied to opportunities in Nova Scotia, Maine, Florida, Texas, and California (just to draw the perimeter). I had even considered an opportunity in Australia. In the midst of casting a wide net, the Alaskan opportunity took us completely by surprise. More specifically, it just walked up and tapped me on the shoulder. Almost a year ago to the day (May 18<sup>th</sup>) a fellow member of my home church, [Faith Presbyterian Tacoma](#) approached me after a worship service and asked, "Hey, do you think you might be interested in planting a church in

Alaska?” We hadn’t even thought of Alaska. A year later, it is a great reminder that God is at work everywhere – even in the places that we are not thinking of.

Honesty compels us to admit that we are just beginning to get excited about the move to Alaska. It wasn’t until this January that the opportunity began to take on any true shape. And if January brought the exciting possibility of heading north to the “Last Frontier,” March brought an even more startling foray into the unexpected. I arrived home from work one evening to a noticeably giddy wife. As I followed the handwritten instructions stuck to the front door, I found a small envelope taped to my computer screen. The contents of the envelope and my clearly elated wife told me that after ten years of waiting we were officially expecting our first child (due to arrive this coming October)! My response was not the stuff of movies – it was something close to flat out disbelief. Three and a half months later, I am just beginning to realize that God truly is giving us a child. That precious slow growing reality both reverberates around and mirrors the dawning reality of our pending move to Alaska.

So how do we feel about moving to Alaska? Well, all jumbled together with the aforementioned pioneering spirit, the rest of our feelings are, no doubt, the usual suspects. We



*Just one of the neighbors dropping by to show off the new baby.*

anticipate that it won’t take much time to realize that we are a long way from Tacoma - it’s a 2,440-mile drive to the Kenai Peninsula and Canada is standing in the way. We will dearly miss our church, our families, and our friends. With a child on the way, we wonder if we will have the kind of birthing options that are available to us in Washington. I nearly weep at the thought that the first baptism in the new church plant just might be my own child, and I discretely ponder how to best invest our future child’s yearly oil dividend (ok, not really on this last one).

We wonder what it will be like to only get six “full sun hours” in the darkest days of winter and almost nineteen in the brightest days of summer. A small towns seem romantic us, but what it will it really be like to trade in the three million plus residents of the Seattle – Tacoma – Bellevue Metro area (5,872 sq. miles) for the fifty-seven thousand souls of the Kenai Peninsula (16,013 sq.

miles). What will it be like to try to catch, clean and cook a salmon dinner in less than an hour? What will it look like for our Lord Jesus to make this new church body effective “fishers of men?”

Big changes are on the way and even more unanswered questions loom over us. We are thankful for the support of the Northwest Church Planting Network and of churches and individuals that are already beginning to partner with us. We have already been blessed with our new friends in the Peninsula and are encouraged by their excitement for this new work. But most of all, we are thankful that the ultimate things are not left to chance. We are moving north to Alaska to join the church’s proclamation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. This is a strong proclamation that Jesus promised that he would build His church upon ([Matthew 16:18](#)). Each new day will provide us with the opportunity to forge our feelings on this unfulfilling promise. We truly believe that living by faith will be the most rewarding and exciting kind of life.

If you are interested in following the progress of this new church plant in the Kenai Peninsula or partner with us, please email us at [kpmission@icloud.com](mailto:kpmission@icloud.com) and we will include you in our future newsletters.

Blessings in Christ Jesus,

Andrew and Amy Allen