

AFACT

ANCHORAGE FAITH & ACTION • CONGREGATIONS TOGETHER



SUMMER 2010



Village elders, Bob Aloysius of Kalskag and Paula Ayunerak of Alakanuk, enjoy a light moment at the St. Mary's training.

"Nothing is impossible..."

~Genevieve Anthony, Nightmute



Felix Albert of Tununak and David Albert of Newtok at the leadership training in St. Mary's.

AFACT Takes Leadership Training to the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta

AFACT took its leadership training to St. Mary's, Alaska in March, at the invitation of the Catholic Diocese of Fairbanks. Twenty-five people from the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta gathered for four days in St. Mary's to learn about faith-based community organizing. Prayer services were interwoven with training, assuring that "faith" in faith-based community organizing was in the forefront during the four-day training.

Participants spanned the spectrum of age, from young adults to village elders, and hailed from nine villages throughout the Delta. The lay leaders were joined by clergy, four Jesuit priests, a Deacon and two Sisters of St. Francis. Coordinated by Patrick Tam, Faith Formation Director for the Diocese in the YK Delta, the training provided new insights to both the participants and the trainers.

Patrick noted that the "unique social and cultural landscape of the

YK Delta means adjusting the tools for organizing." After many months of planning, he was pleased with the training.

"There was focus and energy from the group. People were certainly engaged and interested and there were questions about how they could make organizing work in their communities." More importantly, according to Patrick, "there was a sense of hope and a willingness to learn the tools of faith-based community organizing."

Leaders shared the many concerns they have for their families and communities. At the top of the list were concern for the welfare of youth, concern about alcohol abuse and concern about the many suicides, but concerns as basic as dogs running loose in the village were also discussed.

Gemma Gaudio Shares Her Wisdom

Gemma Gaudio, a member of Catholic Native Ministry in Anchorage, presented a session on one-to-one visits at the St. Mary's training. Gemma has been a leader in AFACT's Alaska Native Organizing Ministry since its creation in 2005, and says she found her voice in the ministry. Gemma had been a student at St. Mary's during the 1950s, and being back as a trainer of her Yupik brothers and sisters was an especially rewarding and emotional experience.

Gemma was raised in Hooper Bay, and said when she arrived at the St. Mary's training, "It was like I belonged there. I became one with them." She said that she and the other AFACT trainers "were touching everyone's heart." Gemma said she has "great faith that the participants will be good teachers of faith-based community organizing in their villages."

Continued inside



Ed Kelly of St. Mary's and Patrick Tam of Emmonak demonstrating one model of power.

Genevieve Anthony from Nightmute said that the training made her realize that "nothing is impossible. There are ways that

we can do things" to improve our communities. Kalskag elder, Bob Aloysius, kept the trainers on their toes, making sure that attention was paid to cultural and language differences.

The training was underwritten by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and the Rasmuson Foundation.

A "Call to Care" for Children's Health

AFACT members gathered to pray for children without health care at a June 4th prayer vigil in Anchorage. The vigil came on the heels of Governor Parnell's veto of a bill that would have expanded health care coverage for 1,300 additional children under Denali KidCare. The Governor said his veto came because of a 2001 Alaska Supreme Court ruling that requires the state to pay for medically necessary abortions for any Medicaid and Denali KidCare eligible participant.

Denali KidCare is funded primarily by the federal government, which covered 65% of the cost in FY09. Federal funds cannot be used for abortions, except in life threatening situations, but once a family is eligible for Medicaid in Alaska the state will fund the procedure if medically necessary.

Holding uninsured children in their hearts, AFACT leaders hope for a solution that will ensure that all Alaska children have affordable and accessible health care. In a "call to care" at the prayer vigil, Pastor Lisa Smith, AFACT board chair, said:

"Why do faith communities proclaim a call to care? Because faith communities have a long tradition of caring for people who suffer in mind, body and spirit, today we proclaim the call to care for Alaska's uninsured children...."

- *By learning more about the plight of the uninsured and potential solutions, through study and discussion, we will respond with concern.*
- *By reaching out to help people living without health coverage, through volunteer opportunities, we will respond with concern.*
- *By focusing attention on the plight of Alaska's uninsured children and by promoting respectful discussion to seek and implement solutions, we will respond with justice."*

AFACT looks forward to working with the governor, the legislature, and communities of faith in Anchorage to answer the "call to care" and make the dream of insuring all of Alaska's children a reality.



Dahna Graham, Annette Alleva and David Parker

AFACT Shares a Blessing of Thanksgiving for Two Pastoral Leaders

In early July, AFACT leaders from across Anchorage came together at St. Anthony Catholic Church for food and fellowship and celebration. While leaders celebrated their accomplishments and solidarity, they also bid a bittersweet farewell to two integral pastoral leaders in AFACT's Alaska Native Organizing Ministry. Pastor Karen Sonray of Alaska Native Lutheran Church and Sister Donna Kramer of Catholic Native Ministry have both answered new ministerial calls.



Gemma Gaudio and Sr. Donna Kramer

In five years of involvement with AFACT, they thoughtfully walked with their communities to address issues faced by Alaska Native families, particularly in relation to Native youth. Gemma Gaudio recalled her first sheepish encounter with Sister Donna and is amazed how they have both flourished through their involvement with AFACT. David and Loretta Parker of Alaska Native Lutheran Church shared a prayer, "We praise and thank you, God of our journey, for our loved ones who are soon to leave. May the future be a source of many enriching and transforming moments. Amen." The blessing closed with the singing of Sister Donna's favorite hymn, "How Can I Keep from Singing?" reminding everyone to find joy in continually surprising ways, even in times of transition. After sixteen years of service at Alaska Native Lutheran Church Pastor Karen is discerning a new call. Sister Donna Kramer spent eight years as the director of Catholic Native Ministries and is moving to Los Angeles, California to serve at a Senior Residence Program through her order, The Daughters of Charity.



Allen Griswold

“Buen Camino Amigo”

I recently returned to AFACT following a three-month sabbatical, a generous award to AFACT from the Rasmuson Foundation. The sabbatical gave me an opportunity to devote quality time to my husband and children, to pray, and in the final week to ponder the place of AFACT in our community.

The sabbatical was a personal respite and I am returning with renewed energy. God works in subtle ways, and it was in the last week of my sabbatical that I realized how each of the journeys was connected to the work of AFACT.

In June, accompanied by two of my children, I entered into a 135-mile walk, a portion of a pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain. In existence for more than a thousand years, the pilgrimage is the path St. James walked to share the Good News. It winds through small towns, pastures, Chestnut and Eucalyptus forests and vineyards. My daughter, my son and I each walked at our own pace enjoying time for contemplation. We met up throughout the day along the path, and enjoyed evenings where we recounted our day's journey.

As we encountered other pilgrims during the walk, we would exchange the Camino greeting of “Buen Camino.” On a particular day when my feet stung with blisters and each step seemed more difficult than the last, a Spanish couple approached me and smiled with understanding. They said, “Buen Camino” and then softly, “Amigo.” My blistered feet began to fade into the back of mind. The greeting reminded me that I was sharing the path with strangers, pilgrims from around the world speaking languages foreign to my



AFACT Executive Director Angela Liston with two of her children, James and Eleanor, taking a rest on the Camino de Santiago.

ear, but through the shared experience we had become ‘amigos.’

AFACT members, too, speak many languages, literally and figuratively. They are Alaska Native, Samoan, African American, Hispanic, Filipino, and Caucasian. They are Republicans, Democrats and Independents. They are Catholic, Lutheran, Christian Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist and non-denominational. They are upper, middle and lower income families. These differences might destroy any other organization, but AFACT members thrive because they have formed meaningful relationships while walking together to make Anchorage a better place for their families. They ease the pain of one another’s “blisters” along the way and have become “amigos” in the deepest sense.

My daughter, a lover of American history, joined me in July for a trip to New England to follow another path. We explored the birth of our nation, following the path of the patriots in the Revolutionary War, walking where Paul Revere rode, standing in the room where the Declaration of Independence was debated and signed, visiting a lighthouse that George Washington

had also visited, and finally standing before the Capitol, the White House, and the monuments and memorials of Washington, DC. On the road from Lexington to Concord, we learned about the patriots who joined together to seek justice and build a new nation. Theirs was a grass roots movement, not unlike those that led the way for abolition, women’s suffrage, and civil rights.

Today, more than two hundred years after the Revolutionary War and the declaration of our independence from the British, many people have come to think that they have no voice and no power to make our communities better places to live. Many have forgotten the greatest moments in our history when individuals came together to make the United States a better, more just, more equitable nation. Many have forgotten our roots, but AFACT defies that trend. Working together across race and income and denominational differences, AFACT members know that the power of their relationships reflects the good news that will improve our community in ways not even yet imagined.

Thank you to the Rasmuson Foundation and AFACT for this opportunity.

Buen Camino Amigo,

Angela Liston
Executive Director

Rasmuson Foundation Awards a Multi-Year Grant for Organizer Training Program

The Rasmuson Foundation awarded a multi-year grant to AFACT to develop and sustain a rigorous program to train new professional organizers, meeting a critical need in Alaska.

The program will provide professional training and mentoring for individuals who are passionate about strengthening the ability of their community to engage and influence decisions that impact their families, neighborhoods, schools, or villages.

The program will cover the technical skills required to:

- 1) *develop relationships of trust and accountability,*
- 2) *engage congregational leaders in the scriptural call to justice,*
- 3) *surface community concerns,*
- 4) *train local leaders to address community concerns, and*
- 5) *create and develop a financially independent organization.*

As a result of the work and dedication of AFACT members and staff over the last seven years, AFACT has grown tremendously. AFACT has two full-time staff members and, at this time, additional community organizers are greatly needed. AFACT is grateful to the Rasmuson Foundation for making the new training program possible.

The training program begins January 2011. Interested applicants can contact Angela Liston at (907) 297-7731 or aliston@anchoragefact.org for more information.

AFACT Member Congregations

Alaska Native Lutheran Church

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church

Bethel Chapel

Catholic Native Ministry

Central Lutheran Church

Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

First CME Church

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Immanuel Presbyterian Church

New Hope Baptist Church

Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church

St. Anthony Catholic Church

St. Mark Lutheran Church

For more information contact:

**Anchorage Faith and Action –
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AFACT is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.

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