

# Session One

## What Are Alaska Subsistence Issues?

### Let's All Gather at the Table

#### **Opening**

Hymn *Praise and Thanksgiving* verses 3 and 4 LBW 409

Scripture Philippians 2: 3-11

Prayer God of all time, we seek your guidance in becoming present to Alaska Subsistence Issues. Open our eyes and ears and our minds and hearts to this matter. Native and non-Native, urban and rural, we come. Assist us each one in taking a place at this table for conversation. Give to us grace to pause, to reflect, and to share. In Christ's name we pray. Amen

**Ethical dilemmas** Exploring the answer to "What are Alaska Subsistence Issues?" presents ethical dilemmas. This very basic question would seem to have a simple answer. When the librarian at Alaska Resource Library and Information System was approached for assistance in answering the question, she smiled. She waved her arm at stacks on one side of the room and said, "Its all over there." She noted that there is extensive research on Alaska subsistence in numerous geographic locations in Alaska and their specific animal, bird, and fish populations. The librarian had difficulty locating resources that succinctly described the Alaska Subsistence Issues. The answer to the question "What are Alaska Subsistence Issues?" is complex. The viewpoints of Alaska Native peoples, Alaska judicial authorities, federal government legislators, economic developers, and ecologists provide diverse lenses for answering this question. If the answer to the question about subsistence is presented from the viewpoint of only one or two persons or groups this skews how we act as individuals and as a congregation or synod. Secondly, how many words each person is allowed to present at the table conversation gives power to that perspective. And so we begin with a conversation at a table where there is a diversity of answers to "What are Alaska Subsistence Issues?"

**Table Talk** The idea of coming together at one table as persons with great diversity of opinion is not a new idea. Isaiah 25:6 *On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.* And Isaiah 43:5 *Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you.*

There are thirteen persons/organizations who "gather and speak at the table" on the issue of subsistence. As a class member please volunteer to be the voice of one or more of these persons, who speak. Please consider being the voice for someone whose opinion is different than your own thoughts. As leader, I will be the moderator. Let's all participate.

**Moderator:** We are gathered at the table today to answer the question, "What are Alaskan subsistence issues? The dictionary defines subsistence as the state of existing, the means of supporting life, and the source from which food and other items necessary to exist are obtained. This definition emphasizes the meaning of subsistence as survival.

**Alaska State Judge:** In Alaska, subsistence has been defined in legislation. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act Sec. 803, 16 U.S.C. Section 3114; Alaska Statute 15.05.940 has defined "subsistence uses" as "the non-commercial, customary, and traditional

uses of wild, renewable resources for direct personal or family consumption as food, shelter, fuel, clothing, tools, or transportation, for the making and selling of handicraft articles out of non-edible by-products of fish and wildlife resources taken for personal or family consumption, and for customary trade, barter, or sharing for personal or family consumption.”

**Alaska Native Federation:** “As used in modern Alaska, the word “subsistence” means the hunting, fishing, and gathering activities that have provided food to Alaska’s Native peoples for more than 10,000 years. These practices continue to flourish in most areas of the state today.

“Before the arrival of non-Natives, subsistence was the only form of economic production by which the aboriginal populations fed, clothed, and housed themselves. Conducted in seasonal cycles by small, semi-nomadic bands within recognized territories, subsistence utilized traditional, small scale technologies for harvesting and preserving food, and it distributed the resulting production through communal networks of sharing and bartering...

“How Native people practice subsistence today has changed, but what we are doing is mainly what we have always done. And what we have always done is very different from the economic organization and social relationships of a modern mass culture” (Briefing, p. 15).

**Arctic politician:** “Though the details vary from village to village, the fundamental pattern of economic life that prevails today in the remote communities of Alaska is unambiguous. The economies of these communities are not subsistence economies; they are mixed economies, encompassing large public or government sectors and sizable commercial sectors as well as ongoing subsistence sectors”...(Young, p. 57).

**The Elders of the Alaska Native Nightmute tribe:** “Our area is not an economically developed area. We depend on the sea for our food and clothing. There is much sharing of the catches, as we realize the needs of our brothers and they realize our needs...If the law prohibits hunting of sea mammals at any time, the people will listen to the hunger of their families and hunt even against the law...Everyone of us is Eskimo...We all have to eat our own native food,...We cannot go without it...Please try to fathom our great desire to survive in a way somewhat different from yours,” (Bista, p.4).

**Urban Alaskan:** I think it is essential to remind everyone at this table that the Alaska State Constitution was upheld by the Alaska Supreme Court in the landmark 1989 decision, which states that all Alaskans have equal access to fish and game, regardless of where they live.

**A pastoral letter of the Catholic bishops of Alaska:** “God has blessed Alaska with an abundance of natural resources, which form the backbone of the life and economy of the people of Alaska. The harvest and sale of timber, fish, wildlife, oil, and minerals stimulate the cash economy, create jobs, and allow Alaskans to provide for their families. The fish and wildlife resources must be allocated fairly and justly to promote the common good when they are insufficient to meet the needs of all. In recent years, Alaskans have engaged in a spirited dialogue over the allocation of these resources and the subsistence needs of Alaska’s residents.”

**Arctic politician:** “Even the subsistence sector of the economies of these communities is currently under siege from a number of quarters. Partly, this is a matter of the growth of restrictive public regulations governing subsistence activities. Systems of licensing, open/closed seasons, bag limits, devised originally to control sport and recreational hunting in the lower forty eight states, have been imposed on subsistence harvesters, often with little appreciation of the complexities of subsistence practices in the remote areas of Alaska. Public land managers have become more vocal in opposing...all terrain vehicles... contemporary subsistence practices require regular injections of cash to purchase equipment as well as to obtain gas and

ammunition....recent declines in the public and commercial sectors of the mixed economies of village Alaska constitute a threat to the subsistence sector because they make cash harder to obtain.” (Young, p. 63).

**Economic developer:** “Economic development must begin by commercializing food production...the only way this food can be produced is by commercial agriculture. The focus of commercializing policies must be on extinguishing the institutions and customary laws that sanction subsistence agriculture” (Seavoy, p. 1).

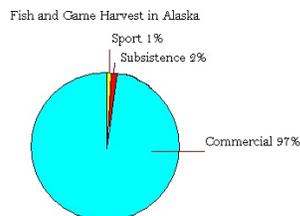
**Mary Pete, Director, Division of Subsistence, Alaska Department of Fish and Game:** “...what we have learned after over twenty years of research on subsistence harvest and uses in Alaska...As expected we learned that subsistence is vital to the cultures and economies of rural Alaskans. Subsistence use areas in the state as defined by the Joint Boards of Fisheries and Game, include 20 per cent of the state’s population. Although economies in small, rural communities are mixed, or need both production of wild local resources and cash to exist, subsistence is the foundation of their sustainability. Jobs are few and often seasonal, with the cost of living the highest in the nation...Family based subsistence production and consumption groups help to maintain the community cohesion and sense of identity in these primarily Alaska Native communities. Subsistence harvest averages 375 pounds of wild fish and game per capita in rural Alaska compared with 23 pounds per capita in urban Alaska. Subsistence harvests in rural communities provide nearly 44 million pounds of food per year at an estimated strict weight replacement value of \$220 million. This does not include the immeasurable value of the sense of well being and accomplishment of providing for one’s family” (U. S. Senate...April 17, 2002).

**Subsistence Management Information:** Our record indicates that fish comprise sixty percent of subsistence foods taken annually. Ninety five percent of rural households consume subsistence caught fish in Alaska (www.subsistmgtinfo.org, 2005).

**Alaska Outdoor Council:** The agenda of our organization related to subsistence is to support personal consumptive use of Alaska’s fish and wildlife; oppose laws that give a preference to user’s based on residency, culture, or ethnic background; support repeal of the federal rural subsistence priority in ANILCA; support the Alaska State Constitution which requires fish and wildlife resources be managed for the common use on a sustained yield principle for the maximum benefit of all people; and we also recognize the enormous contribution of personal consumptive resource uses to Alaskan lifestyles, livelihoods, and standards of living (www.alaskaoutdoorcouncil.org, 2005).

**A sports hunter from the lower forty-eight:** I live in the United States and there is no reason that I should not have the opportunity to hunt in Alaska.

**Alaska Native Federation:** This chart may be useful in identifying who harvests the fish and wildlife of Alaska (Briefing, p.14).



**Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission of the State of Alaska:** Just remember that the seafood industry is the largest source of private sector jobs in Alaska. Seafood from Alaska is an important food source for the world ([www.cfec.state.ak.us](http://www.cfec.state.ak.us), 2005).

**Alaska Marine Conservation Council:** We are working to promote clean-community based commercial fishing, manage the resources, and monitor the process ([www.akmarine.org](http://www.akmarine.org), 2005).

**Moderator:** Let's see and hear the meaning of "subsistence" for the Inupiat villagers of Buckland. This village is on the Buckland River that flows into Kotzebue Sound. This is from *Sharing Ground Alaskans Listening to Alaskans about Subsistence*, a production of the American Friends Service Committee and the Alaska Humanities Forum 2004. (Disc One. Play from the DVD or VHS the section titled "What Could I Say". Play eight minutes only because of time frame.)

### **Questions**

1. What does subsistence mean to you?
2. Anything new about subsistence for you in this presentation?
3. What was the most important information you heard?
4. How do the Alaska Subsistence Issues relate to your living as a Christian each day?

***A verse of Scripture and question for the week*** I Chronicles 29:11 *Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, And You are exalted as head over all.* Am I honoring God in how I use God's earth? In what ways could I seek God's guidance in making choices about Alaska Subsistence Issues?