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Report: to the George Fox College Administration

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REPORT: To George Fox College Administration
FROM: Roy P. Clark, Extension Program Director
SUBJECT: Trip to Kotzebue, Alaska, July 11-25, 1972

My introduction to the proposed College Extension Program at Kotzebue was attendance at the sessions of Alaska Yearly Meeting of Friends July 12-16, where I was invited to bring the evening evangelistic messages. Attendance at the evening services was around 500, mostly native Eskimos.

I attended all sessions of the yearly meeting. I met with the Board of Administration on Tuesday July 11 and presented the plans for the college extension classes, which were unanimously approved. I was asked to present the plan on the floor of the yearly meeting on Thursday July 13, which again met with unanimous approval.

Following the yearly meeting sessions I had several days discussion and consultation with Earl Perisho, Administrative Secretary of the Friends Mission, and Director of the Friends Bible School program at Kotzebue. We set up plans for cooperative curriculum, arranged tentative schedules, and projected possibilities for the future.

During the few days at Kotzebue we contacted some of the business people in the community, some of the school personnel, and the pastors of the churches (Episcopal, Baptist, and Church of God) regarding the proposed program of college classes.

The second week I was invited to be the speaker for the youth camp, which was held upriver above Noorvik, about 75 miles by boat east of Kotzebue. There were about 80 Eskimo young people for five days of camping. The logistics of planning and managing such a camp are staggering, involving transporting all personnel and supplies the entire distance by outboard motorboat. But largely through the efforts of Earl Perisho and Phyllis Harris, youth sponsor, it was a successful camp.

During the camp I tried to challenge the young people to a total commitment to Christ, to discipline their lives, improve their minds, and dedicate themselves to a place of service in today's world. I talked with several personally about continuing their education at George Fox College.

I preached a total of 11 times during my stay, along with sharing in a ministry of music at both the yearly meeting and youth camp. I fell in love with the people, and was impressed with the depth and intensity of their spiritual devotion. They are a very responsive people, and of course the altar was lined at every service of yearly meeting. Their singing is most inspiring! Artistically it may lack somewhat, but the spirit is contagious. Their praying, preaching, and testimonies are all in the Eskimo language, but so devout and sincere! Their unhurried lack of concern for time-pressure is most commendable. The closing service of yearly meeting lasted more than 6 hours, with singing, preaching, prayer service, and testimony time.

The educational challenge at Kotzebue and surrounding villages is somewhat staggering! Not a single pastor in Alaska Yearly Meeting has even a high school education. And the drop-out rate of the young people is very high. Kotzebue High School last year had 268 students enrolled, but the graduating class last spring numbered 12 students. But I sense a growing concern for education among the church leaders and I am sure the picture will change, slowly but surely. We will have to meet the needs of the people where they are, and adapt our program to their level.

Words fail to express my deep appreciation for the excellent work of Earl and Janice Perisho, GFC graduates, and resident missionaries under California Yearly Meeting. They are versatile and talented, patient and dedicated, and they have the confidence and love of the natives in all the villages. They are key people in the success of the work there.

Also in attendance at the yearly meeting sessions were Herbert and Ruthanna Hadley from Philadelphia, executive secretary of the Friends World Committee, and longtime personal friend. Also Dr. and Mrs. Bryan Michenor, retired missionaries from Kenya. These Friends expressed genuine interest in our projected college extension program.

The native leadership in Alaska Yearly Meeting is made up of solid mature Christians. While lacking in formal education, they give evidence of vision and understanding of needs and trends in today's world, and concern for involvement of the church in upgrading their homes and communities. The possibility of a housing program on church owned land in Kotzebue, along with new educational opportunities represents a healthy concern of the church for the total person. They have a desire to preserve their native culture and language as they make the transition to modern technology. Their vision and sacrifice in starting new churches this year in Anchorage and Fairbanks is most remarkable.

Our projected plans for college classes have tentatively scheduled beginning in October with Accounting, Bookkeeping, Consumer Math, Public Speaking (including Homiletics for preachers) and Music Theory. These will be taught as short term classes by Harold Wilhite and myself. The Yearly Meeting will attempt to bring the pastors in from the villages for part of the month for a pastors' short course. At this time we will also introduce the possibility of course in several areas by "programmed instruction" and attempt to recruit students.

Decisions yet to be made concern the matter of fees for the courses, exact credit hour values, and A.A. degree (if any) course content. For the next two months our work will be researching programmed materials, writing publicity for Alaskan papers, writing syllabi for courses, and preparing a brochure-catalogue for the combined Bible School-College Extension program at Kotzebue.

Roy P. Clark
Extension Program Director