

SOCIAL LIFE AND RITUAL PRACTICES IN AN ALASKAN PENTECOSTAL  
COMMUNITY (THE FIRST ASSEMBLY OF GOD, FAIRBANKS)

By

Nickole Kathren Robarge

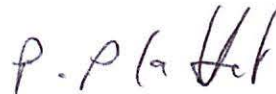
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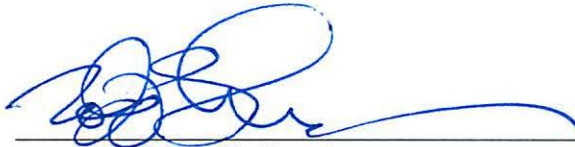
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Chair, Department of Anthropology

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SOCIAL LIFE AND RITUAL PRACTICES IN AN ALASKAN PENTECOSTAL  
COMMUNITY (THE FIRST ASSEMBLY OF GOD, FAIRBANKS)

A

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty

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By

Nickole Kathren Robarge, B.A

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## Abstract

This MA thesis research project focuses on the First Assembly of God Church in Fairbanks, Alaska. It seeks to better understand the implementation of Pentecostal-Charismatic (PC) Christianity in 21<sup>st</sup> century urban Alaska. While social activism and outreach form a significant portion of the success of Pentecostalism in Alaska (as anywhere else), my research shows that it is also substantially due to the appeal of ritual to newcomers. In particular, I suggest that there are forms of spiritual possession and spirit embodiment that need to be examined in relation to the attractiveness of Pentecostalism in Fairbanks. There is a gap in academic literature pertaining to Pentecostal rituals. Recent anthropological studies have focused primarily on notions of conversion, rupture, empowerment, and modernization. My research complements these studies by shedding an unprecedented light on Pentecostal processes of ritualization. Participant observation and interviews were used to examine ritual activity and the nature of spiritual gifts within PC Christianity in Fairbanks.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Signature Page .....	ii
Title Page .....	iii
Abstract .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
List of Figures.....	viii
List of Appendices.....	viii
Acknowledgments .....	ix
Dedication page .....	x
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework.....	6
2.1 Spiritual Possession: <i>The Divide between Possession Theorists</i> .....	6
2.2 Ritual .....	10
2.3 Mobility (Fluidity).....	14
Chapter 3 Background.....	18
3.1 Christianity in Alaska.....	18
3.2 Brief History of Pentecostalism .....	26
3.3 Assembly of God Church (AG) .....	35
3.3.1 First Assemblies in Alaska .....	39
Chapter 4 The Culture of Pentecostalism.....	40
4.1 Connection between Churches .....	40

4.2	Membership .....	43
4.3	Mobility and Church Planting .....	47
Chapter 5 An Ethnographer in the Assembly .....		58
5.1	Participant Observation in a PC Community .....	59
5.2	Interviews and Conversations with faith practitioners .....	62
Chapter 6 Rituals and Ritualized Social Programs in the Assembly.....		67
6.1	Wednesday Night Bible Study .....	69
6.2	Tuesday Night Bible Study (Women’s Bible Study) .....	72
6.3	Retreats .....	79
6.3.1	Men’s Retreat .....	80
6.3.2	Women’s Retreat .....	80
6.4	Handprint.....	84
6.5	Quilting Circle.....	87
6.6	Sunday Service .....	88
6.6.1	Usual Service.....	88
6.6.2	Special Sunday Services.....	93
Chapter 7 Discussion of Key Themes .....		97
7.1	Socio-political Themes in the Assembly.....	97
7.2	Language versus Physicality in Rituals.....	105
7.3	Reassessing the Shamanism/Possession Divide.....	109
Chapter 8 Conclusion .....		111
References Cited.....		117

## List of Figures

Figure 6.1: Body, <i>Spirit</i> and Soul .....	76
Figure A-1: U.S. AG Churches Opened and Closed (1965-2008) .....	125
Figure A-2: U.S. AG Churches Opened and Closed (2009-2012) .....	126
Figure A-3: 2010 Annual Church Ministries Report: Women’s Department .....	127
Figure A-4: AG Worldwide Churches and Adherents (1987-2011) .....	128
Figure A-5: AG Churches and Member Statistics by Geographical District, 2011 .....	129
Figure B-1: Original (First) Assembly Church, the beginnings. ....	130
Figure B-2: The First Assembly of God Church in Fairbanks, AK (field site).....	131
Figure C-1: Fairbanks AG Mileposts (1939-1962) .....	132
Figure C-2: Fairbanks AG Mileposts (1963-1971) .....	133
Figure C-3: Fairbanks AG Mileposts (1976-1989) .....	134

## List of Appendices

Appendix A AG Statistical Information.....	125
Appendix B Photographs.....	130
Appendix C Fairbanks AG Mileposts (1939-1989) .....	132



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This MA thesis research project focuses on the First Assembly of God Church in Fairbanks, Alaska. It seeks to better understand the implementation of Pentecostal-Charismatic (PC) Christianity in 21<sup>st</sup> century urban Alaska. It is difficult to support a view that the massive growth of Pentecostalism is sustainable because numbers of congregants are not growing as rapidly as in the beginning of the religious movement in the 1960-70's. When I say success I mean the effectiveness of worship in sustaining and bringing in new membership. I suggest that this effectiveness has to do with the ritualization process.

There is a gap in academic literature pertaining to Pentecostal rituals. Recent studies have focused primarily on notions of rupture (e.g. Meyer 1998), empowerment (e.g. Robbins 2004), and modernization (e.g. Miller 2009). My research will complement these studies by shedding an unprecedented light on Pentecostal processes of ritualization. By doing so I will follow a recent trend, which has focused on the nature of rituals as a large component in the success of Pentecostalism (Lindhardt 2011). My main research question is the following: To what extent is the success of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in Fairbanks related to the specific nature of its rituals? In this thesis I will argue that much of what I have observed as social program contains ritual aspects.

Pentecostalism is a form of Protestantism taking on much of its fundamental theology. However, Pentecostalism, especially Charismatic groups,

differs in methods of ritual and worship from other Protestant denominations. As stipulated above, my fieldwork focuses on these methods of ritual as correlates to the success of Pentecostalism not only in Fairbanks, Alaska but on a global scale. According to some church members Fairbanks is isolated and subject to a harsh climate, Pastor Rob Rucci states that this could be a reason for Christian groups to band together in Alaska as opposed to Protestant denominations in the lower 48. These groups are predominantly mainline Protestant denominations. Alaska is still viewed as a region that needs to be evangelized, thus it is as a potentially rich state for this research as Latin America (Flora 1976; Martin 1994; Westerlund 2009), Africa (Bangura 2012; Burgess 2012; Hexham and Poewe 1994; Kalu 2008), China and Indonesia (Anderson 2004; Au 2012; Reed 2012), where much of the emphasis is on evangelism.

The amount of literature on Pentecostalism and Charismatic gifts (such as speaking in tongues, healing, prophecy and discernment) is vast, however there is a minute amount of this literature specifically relating to Alaska. Much emphasis is placed on speaking in tongues, however there are several other Charismatic gifts of the Spirit, which are of equal importance within Pentecostalism and should be further explored. For these reasons, my research is original and contributes to broader anthropological debates.

Throughout this thesis I hope to afford clarity regarding the origins of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity as well as Pentecostalism as a movement in the North. I will illustrate various rituals and liturgy unique to the Assemblies of God (AG), the largest Pentecostal denomination. The establishment of the First Assembly of God

(affiliated with Assemblies of God) Church in Fairbanks is part of the global spread of Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity. I will demonstrate the importance of liturgy in the First Assembly and within the broader Pentecostal religion.

### *Personal Statement*

I grew up Catholic, though today I consider myself not affiliated with any particular religious denomination. I thought issues would arise while I conducted my field research regarding my religious preference, however I found that though I was encouraged to convert I was not pressured or scolded for not being Pentecostal. I found the religion and the community alluring. However, for the purposes of this study I tried to remain as unbiased as possible. I think that growing up Christian and retaining much of the fundamental theology puts me in a good place to conduct this research, because it gives me a bit of a head start.

### *Research Questions*

Throughout my time in the field, several themes and questions emerged. There are three main components to my research: ritual, gifts, and the connection between success and ritual. Within each component I have a set of research questions.

- 1) What are the rituals practiced by members of the First Assembly of God Church in Fairbanks?
- 2) What are spiritual gifts? How do individuals practice and understand these gifts?

a) How do individuals experience speaking in tongues? Does a form of spiritual possession occur? If so, when do these spiritual possessions occur and in what context? Does spiritual possession always result in speaking in tongues? Are there other ritual modes of expression?

3) Is there a connection between this success of Pentecostal Christianity (PC) in Fairbanks, and the nature of PC rituals?

I address Charismatic and spiritual gifts though glossolalia is not the only gift worth mention. Though speaking in tongues is often at the forefront when Pentecostalism is the topic for discussion, there are several other spiritual gifts, which are of equal importance. In my own field research, it has become evident that the Charismatic gift of Discernment and the gift of Healing are equally valued in this community. Throughout my research it became evident that there are various forms of glossolalia based on social context with varying levels of spiritual phenomena.

As my research in the field continued it became increasingly apparent that there was a form of spiritual possession/embodiment, though I do not wish to convey the term with a negative connotation. As participants are filled with the Holy Spirit I wondered if there is some form of spiritual possession within Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity and how those who participate conceptualize it. Who experiences the phenomenon? Thus, spiritual possession/embodiment has become an important component in my research.

There has been little anthropological research done on spiritual possession within Pentecostal Christianity in the North, which makes my work original and all the more interesting. Often it is non-western religions that are said to participate in spiritual

possession. I argue that within Pentecostalism there is spiritual embodiment and in some cases there may be a form of spiritual possession present in Fairbanks.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I will provide a framework within three major themes in my research. The first is the notion of spiritual embodiment/possession. Within this element I will discuss the classic debate of shamanism versus possession drawing primarily on the work of Luc de Heusch (1971), Erika Bourguignon (1973; 2004) Ioan M. Lewis (2003). I will also delve into ritual theory with Catherine Bell (1997) and Stanley J. Tambiah (1979) among others. Finishing the section with a brief discussion on mobility. Mobility is an important aspect of PC globalization on both a small and large scale. I will not explore mobility theory to its fullest though it makes sense to include mobility in view of ritual and PC discussion. This MA thesis contributes in a small part to the anthropology of mobility. This religious movement is rather defined in part by its ability to be mobile.

### 2.1: Spiritual Possession: The Divide between Possession Theorists

Within anthropology there is a division in the way spiritual possession is conceptualized. This separation in theory occurs between shamanism and spiritual possession theory. Shamanism being an active attempt to possess spiritual forces and possession taking a more passive role as an individual is possessed with a spiritual entity.<sup>1</sup> The division goes back to the classical debate of shamanism versus possession. When discussing spiritual possession several topics come up; shamanism and trance are frequently viewed as a way to establish an intentional contact with supernatural entities. It is often the case that the term possession has a negative connotation in the Western

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I differentiate between shamanism and possession for analytical purposes. These phenomena are complex and subject to much debate.



world; however there are several forms of possession and not all are 'negative.' De Heusch states that in several cross-cultural circumstances "the spirit is accepted as a blessing. This desirable possession can be authentically religious and wholly accepted..." (1971: 156). In this research I observed individuals seeking a closer connection to God or filling the individual wholly. De Heusch states that possession "is a religious or magico-religious system necessitating collective rituals and a more respectful attitude to the sacred than shamanism" (de Heusch 1971: 158). Bourguignon states that,

"Possession beliefs are rooted in conceptions of the human being as consisting of several elements (such as body, mind, personhood, self, name identity, soul or souls, even part souls) where one or more of these may be replaced, temporarily or permanently, by another entity" (2004:137).

It is also apparent that a second entity also exists. This entity "may also be thought to enter the body without displacing the first, even though the behavioral manifestations are those of this additional presence" (Ibid: 137). Bourguignon finds that within sample societies ninety percent included institutionalized altered state of consciousness in a sacred context (Bourguignon1973). Possession is often associated with exotic cultures in far away lands. I attempt to show that some manifestations of possession do occur in Alaska and within PC Christianity at the First Assembly. De Heusch suggests that "authentic possession" (1971: 152) is found primarily in Africa, Siberia, Haiti and Brazil. This thesis project illustrates that some forms of spiritual possession/embodiment can be found within the United States (in Pentecostalism) and globally.

There are numerous lenses in which to view possession theory. Bourguignon presents two main behavioral manifestation categories within the possession paradigm. The first is illustrated by “negative changes in physical health or behavior or, on the other hand, enhanced powers” (Bourguignon 2004: 137). This category is referred to as Possession (non-Trance Possession) (Ibid: 138). The second group is referred to as Possession Trance, made up of “alterations in state of consciousness and behavior” (Ibid: 138; see also Bourguignon 1973). Trance possession can be spontaneous, yet the interpretation is dependent on specific cultural context (Bourguignon 2004: 138). Bourguignon surmises that there are events in which a supernatural or spiritual entity may speak through the individual (Ibid: 138). The concepts of possession and trance possession have become fundamental in this research project.

Lewis states that “‘Altered States of Consciousness’ is an umbrella term, applied to psychological and sociological phenomena regularly encountered in the study of trance, possession, and shamanism” (2003: 188). Now these “Altered States of Consciousness” Lewis explains are often individual experiences of “rapturous moments...so-called ‘peak-experiences,’” (Lewis 2003: 188). I would like to expand the notion to include not only private but public experiences as well for the purposes of this research. Often these “peak-experiences” occur in the public setting of a Church environment where other individuals may experience similar phenomena. Lewis goes on to state that trances demonstrate an external, physical outburst, which others can discern as a possession of sorts. The human body is a vessel for the outside force, which in this case is God, or more specifically the Holy Spirit.

Lewis talks about the act of possession as the first step to initiation within a religious group (2003: 192). In this case speaking in tongues can be considered a form of coming into one's faith. Other Charismatic gifts may have the same effect of initiation though they may seem less 'exotic'; each individual is gifted corresponding to his/her character.

In PC activities God comes to the believer through the Holy Spirit, "Possession by an external spiritual force is, of course, a culturally specific explanation of behavior or of a state of being" (Lewis 2003: 192). This trance possession as Lewis would call it is different cross culturally, it "is a manifestation of the invasion of the human body by an external spirit agent" (Ibid: 191-192). According to de Heusch

"The human body is the vehicle used by the sacred...lending him [God] their voice. The devotee's own personality is effaced; it offers no resistance to the irruption of the god's personality" (de Heusch 1971: 151).

In my research believers are to be true followers of God and as such will attempt to speak directly with the divine. It is the belief that when God speaks back it is through the Holy Spirit which resides within the individual. Once the spiritual connection is made the believer is expected to make sure God's message is truly divine by backing up the message with scripture. The utterances expressed (God's message) at this "peak" of spiritual phenomena (in this case speaking in tongues or the use of other Charismatic gifts) are considered by participants to be that of God, divine in origin. The individual is in a way possessed or perhaps embodied with the Holy Spirit, and as de Heusch demonstrates, a vessel in which God's will is carried through to the rest of the

congregation. In this way Pentecostalism is rather different from other Protestant denominations because each participant can have a close relationship and contact with the divinity. De Heusch explains that in this act of individual worship the role of the pastor or priest is lessened and he is no longer necessary in which case “they enter the zone of shamanism and possession...” (1971: 151). I will discuss this notion of the role of the pastor as well as that of adherents and members in chapter 7.

At the First Assembly adherents do not view their spiritual phenomena, for example speaking in tongues, as possession but rather a filling of the Spirit. Individuals often spoke of being “filled with the spirit.” Within the church community a true filling with the Spirit means that an individual is one with the Holy Spirit and literally filled inwardly with the Spirit of God. In this, PC Christians experience a possession of the Spirit in which the Holy Spirit pours out from within the participant and fills the body, creating a space where God and follower can come together.

## 2.2: Ritual

Ritual is a complex issue in anthropology. There are numerous definitions, all of which cannot be applied universally. Since no definition is universally applicable I use an amalgamation of several concepts on the definition of ritual. In this discussion on the theory of ritual it is only fitting to explore the ideas of Catherine Bell (1997), Victor Turner (1977), S. J. Tambiah (1979), and William Sax (2010).

Catherine Bell has written volumes on ritual theory and practice. Bell states that there have been three phases throughout the progression of ritual theory. In the first phase

early theorists believed ritual to be of “other” origins, that is to say ritual was considered exotic and only present in “primitive” societies while absent from Western civilization (Bell 1997: 254). In the second phase theorists began to realize the importance of ritual in socio-cultural understanding. The last wave of theory began to romanticize ritual as having transformational qualities within socio-cultural schemata on the individual and group levels. Over the years, ritual itself has transformed from a set of rules (e.g.: The Bible) to including the practices of the individuals who follow these rules (Asad 1993). Though Bell does not necessarily create her own definition of ritual she does explain that acts such as dancing to appease a spirit, bowing one’s head, or offerings to a deity are all seen through different theoretical lenses. Bell states,

“...all these acts are ways of dealing with the world and its perceived forces and sources of power. The form and scope of interpretation differ and that should not be lightly dismissed, but it cannot be amiss to see in all of these instances practices that illuminate our shared humanity” (1997: 267).

Though several theologians may still see Western society as not exotic and thusly consisting of less ritualization, I agree with Bell that ritual is inherent within human society yet definitions of ritual should be culture specific. Attempting a universal definition of ritual will simply not work cross-culturally. Ritual is fluid and forms differently from group to group as well as throughout time.

Victor Turner viewed ritual as a social practice, one that dissolved or lessened social conflicts. Turner addresses the idea of liminal states of being where an individual

is in-between states in society. This can also include religious ritual, for example an individual transcending his/her 'natural' state to one shared with the Holy Spirit, this state does not last long and the individual emerges back to his/her natural state of being.

Turner's definition of ritual derives from African rituals and emphasized the purposive establishment by human actors of activities influencing supernatural agents;

“...a stereotyped sequence of activities...performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural (i.e. beyond 'normal' or natural) entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests.

Rituals may be seasonal, hallowing a culturally defined moment of change in the climatic cycle or the inauguration of an activity such as planting, harvesting, or moving from winter to summer pasture; or they may be contingent, help in response to an individual or collective crisis” (1977 [1972]: 1100).

Stanley Tambiah is an anthropologist who conducts research among spirit cults in Sri Lanka and Thailand. His work is significant to this research in the way he defines ritual. In his 1979 Radcliffe-Brown Lecture, *A Performative Approach to Ritual*, Tambiah states:

“Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotype (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition) Ritual action

in its constitutive features is performative in these three senses: in the Austinian sense of performative wherein saying something is also doing something as a conventional act; in the quite different sense of a staged performance that uses multiple media by which the participants experience the event intensively; and in the third sense of indexical values – I derive this concept from Peirce – being attached to and inferred by actors during the performance” (Tambiah 1979: 119).

In this definition ritual is not simply a daily repeated action like brushing ones teeth. Here ritual has a symbolic and performative meaning, which others within the religious community will recognize as significant and efficient. This can be something as seemingly simple as touch. As I will discuss later physicality of prayer can be equally as meaningful as utterances and words used in communication.

William Sax poses that ritual is indeed hard to define. He surmises that ritual is a practice that would be easily recognizable to a member of a respective society.

“...we ‘know it when we see it’-and what we know to be rituals when we see them are acts that are apparently nonrational, in which the means do not seem proportionate to the ends, the intended objects of human actions are nonempirical beings, or the theories of efficacy that explain the ritual acts are inconsistent with modern, scientific paradigms” (Sax 2010: 6).

Sax theorizes that rituals from a participant prospective often “work.” For example a rabbits foot is well known in American culture as a good luck charm, it is easily identifiable to others in the culture and is accredited with supernatural power, the power

of good fortune for the owner. Though this example is not in itself a ritual it may perhaps be considered a talisman of some sort. Within Christianity today there are certain rituals that other Christians recognize within specific denominations, for example communion or the taking of the Eucharist (the wafer and wine which are representative of the body and blood of Christ).

In many of the social programs I have attended throughout my fieldwork there are ritual elements. According to Martin Lindhardt “[d]ivine presence is frequently perceived by Pentecostals outside of strictly ritual contexts, e.g., during informal conversations...I think that it does make sense to regard church meetings as distinguished—that is, more ritualized...” (2011: 225).

### 2.3: Mobility (Fluidity)

I began my research with the idea of mobility as a key element in the spread of Pentecostalism, however I soon became more interested in the concept of spiritual embodiment or possible possession. While analyzing my fieldwork I realized that mobility actually had a larger role within the PC community. Thus I would like to address the notion of mobility within my own research. André Droogers et al. states:

“Though Pentecostal conversion can be experienced as a ‘moment of immediacy,’ it can also be perceived as a lifelong and ‘live’ process in which individuals continuously move, within a particular Pentecostal space characterized by a constant and urgent call for personal reform, but also beyond” (2010: 145).



Since the 1900's there has been an increase in PC membership within the Assemblies of God organization. As the largest denomination of Pentecostal Christians, the AG often publishes statistical data to demonstrate their success worldwide. Appendix A (Figure A-4) shows that the worldwide number of AG adherents in 2003 was approximately 50,718,028, and as of 2011 the total has risen to an estimated 65,398,796 adherents (<http://ag.org>).

Mobility is not simply a relation to globalization and increasing congregation numbers but also refers to the flow of people and ideology.

“Mobilities also includes movements of images and information on local, national, and global media... And it involves examining how the transporting of people and the communicating of messages, information, and images increasingly converge and overlap... Thus mobilities need to be examined in their fluid interdependence and not in their separate spheres” (Sheller and Urry 2006: 212).

Thanks to modern transportation and technology methods the mobility of people has become remarkably changed and more efficient. Droogers et al. states that “[w]hether or not Pentecostals migrate for religious purposes, migration has helped to spread the Pentecostal message across national boundaries” (2010: 147). With this constant fluidity of people, the spread of ideology and religious practice also becomes more readily available. With the proper funding PC Christians are able to be mobile on a larger scale.

Large-scale mobility is often associated with money and reflects power, “[m]obility is a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship (Skeggs 2004:

49). In my own research I have seen a relatively small church of approximately 150-200 people raise \$8,500 over a period of three months in order to send a missions team to Uganda. The goal of the mission's team is to build a small schoolhouse and bring Christianity and prosperity to a struggling village. The money was raised fast, while funds for Pastor Rucci and his new church in South Carolina were also being collected...enough so that almost the entire cost of the move as well as the opening of the church were covered.

Mobility today reaches new levels through technology. Advances in communication, media and technology in general play a role in the spread of the PC movement. According to Droogers et al. there are two forms of movement physical and metaphorical. The physical aspects of movement include the actual geographical mobility of individuals from place to place around the world (2010: 146-7). Metaphorical mobility breaks down into various concepts, two of which are: a) sociocultural mobility and b) virtual media (Ibid: 147).

Within sociocultural mobility converts may move about in societal structures, “[t]heir faith can help Pentecostals to move upward in society (Ibid: 147). Mobility is also conceptualized virtually including various forms of communication such as the Internet, mobile phones, and etcetera. Virtual forms of mobility “facilitate contacts between the faithful, bridging real distances through virtual space. Without leaving their desk, believers can virtually move from site to site” (Ibid: 147). Though an individual is sedentary through virtual involvement a participant becomes mobile on a global scale.

Virtual mobility also includes the flux of images and information through various forms of media on local, national and global levels (Sheller 2004: 212).

Most churches have an Internet homepage and contact information online accessible to the public anywhere in the world. Even the contact information includes phone, cell phone, e-mail, and now Facebook, (an ever expanding internet social network), pages in addition to the physical address. These social networks and other virtual media forms allow for individuals to become participants from geographical locations, which would otherwise be problematic. Georg Simmel states that human beings have a will or drive to connect creating bridges connecting various communities whether physical or metaphorical, symbolizing “the extension of our volitional sphere over space” (1997: 171).

Rather than word of mouth information regarding one’s spiritual life can be found virtually. Dombrowski states that, in Southeastern Alaska, there “is considerable movement between Pentecostal churches by church attendees” (2001: 120). I have come to a similar conclusion in that PC Christians in Interior Alaska are quite mobile on an individual level as well. Individuals moving between churches as well as leaving one congregation in order to create or “plant” a church somewhere else. As participants move around they seek specific worship styles, which best coalesce with their ritual needs, thus ritual has become a key theme within this research project. I will discuss this concept of mobility further in chapter 4.

## Chapter 3: Background

In this chapter I illustrate the history of missionary movement in Alaska. This shows the flow of missionary activities over time and the overall mobility. This chapter creates a background providing a context to situate this research. This section will address missionization in Alaska as well as the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in the lower 48 and its spread.

### 3.1: Christianity in Alaska

#### *Missionary Activism*

Alaska has a long history of missionary activity; even today various Christian denominations consider Alaska a region that needs to be Christianized. Beginning in the late 1700's the first Russian missionaries brought Orthodoxy to Alaska. A vast array of literature on missionary Alaska exists however much of the focus is on the impact of Russian Orthodoxy in rural Alaska (Black 1984, 2004; Kan 1999; Znamenski 1999). Some work has been done on non-Orthodox religions such as the impact of Protestant movements. These movements tend to be seen as working "against [traditional/Native] culture" (Dombrowski 2001) which makes my research original due to its urban nature with a diverse yet prominently non-native population. I contribute to this body of literature, in particular regarding the spread of Christianity and the travel of religious practices from church to church. In this section I will discuss the flow of Christianity across Alaska and expand on the Protestant efforts in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Russian Orthodox Church lays claim as the oldest denomination of Christianity in Alaska. In 1794 a group of Russian monks were among the first missionaries to travel to Alaska (Znamenski 1999: 48). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century priests and other church clergy became part of the Orthodox missionary effort primarily in Southern Alaska (Black 1984: 21). Climate and terrain often became a limiting factor for missionaries in their travels, so efforts were originally clustered around Southern Alaska (Znamenski 1999: 53).

Both the Russian and American governments supported and financed respective missionary activities on the Alaskan frontier, Russia backing Orthodoxy and American interests providing for Protestantism (Krivonosov 2008: 80). This funding allowed for larger numbers of missionaries to travel to Alaska as well as setting up multiple settlements thusly influencing a larger population. The Russian period lasted from 1794 to 1867 (Krivonosov 2008: 16). Russian Orthodoxy experienced limited success. In 1802 the Tlingit rebelled and slaughtered Russian settlers in Noro-Arkhangelsk (Krivonosov 2008: 49). Though the Tlingit initially rebelled against the Russians, many found Orthodoxy similar to their own religion. Tlingit religion often describes a father and son. The son is said to love human beings and help in providing food for people, acting as a mediator between the creator and humans. This aligns well with Christianity's ideology of the Father (God) and Jesus Christ (son) (Ibid: 73).

According to Ernest Burch the Inupiat were non-exclusive in their religious belief structure (Burch 1994:12). By this Burch indicates that the Inupiat believed in multiple ideologies at the same time, for example the Inupiat believed in both traditional religion

and Christianity without necessarily melding the two theologies into one or choosing one over the other.

“Some central symbols of the Native populations coincided with those of Orthodoxy. The Aleuts, like the Orthodox, prayed to the east. The symbolism of light was central and associated with good. A bird represented the spirit, the creator” (Black 2004: 230).

There are other linkages between Native religions and Orthodoxy; these similarities provided a foundation for Russian Orthodoxy to build on.

Missionaries like Priest Ioann Veniaminov learned the language and culture of the Natives he was trying to convert in order to better understand Native culture. Veniaminov became one of the first ethnographers in Alaska. While in Alaska Veniaminov created the first Aleut translation of the Bible (Krivonosov 2008: 51-2). Missionaries learning the native language most likely aided in acceptance of Orthodoxy.

It was the goal of missionaries from each division to “save” and “civilize” the Native Americans, and “remake the spiritual landscape” in Alaska (Williams 2009: 152). This happened mostly through native converts and other individuals (like traders) as they passed through villages (Black 2004: 223). Anthropologist Kirk Dombrowski illustrates the impact of missionary activities in his work *Against Culture*. Dombrowski states that missionaries trained Native Alaskans in pastoral programs which stimulated village prayer groups and added to the spread of evangelical ideas within native communities (2001: 120).

According to Krivonosov 2008 and Williams 2009 Russian Orthodox missionaries often protected native peoples from being harmed (rape, murder, and in general, mistreatment) via Russian fur traders and explorers. Russian priests remained tolerant; they did not force native people to completely give up their traditional beliefs or language while they sought to assimilate native religious belief and practice to that of Russian Orthodoxy (Williams 2008: 154). Whereas many (American) Protestant missionaries called for a more complete sociocultural assimilation placing strict edicts against the use of native languages and cultural practices like dancing, which were deemed as evil and not of God (Ibid: 154, see also Dombrowski 2001).

With the United States's purchase of Alaska in 1867 the Russian government significantly reduced funding for Orthodox missions in the territory (Znamenski 2003:18). Russia did however provided assistance for churches and schools which, according to Black, taught Russian, English and Native languages until 1917 when all funding ceased (Black 2004: 247). Russian Orthodoxy does persist in Alaska today, though the following American period has limited its growth with the rise of various forms of Protestantism. It is worth noting that Russian Orthodox and Protestant missionaries were competitors in Alaska. At the time Russian Orthodox practitioners viewed Protestantism as an illegitimate form of Christianity. On the flip side Protestants, in particular Presbyterians, accused Orthodoxy "of empty ritual" (Kan 1999: 272-273).

The American period began with the purchase of Alaska in the late 1860's, when the United States government took a vested interest in the Alaskan Territory. In 1880 the Protestant Federal Council divided Alaska amongst dominant Protestant denominations,

which I will explain in depth later (Flanders 1984: 143). Missionary and political figurehead Sheldon Jackson led the federal council and began making changes within Inupiat society. According to Susan Fair Christian missionaries and European colonizers in a general sense “changed the nature, content, and meaning” of Eskimo festivals and overall life (Fair 2000: 465). Jackson called for a complete paradigm shift away from traditional Inupiat customs toward an Americanized way of life. By not allowing certain festivals Jackson and other missionaries were able to better break the social system, because ritual events within these festivals often promoted the formation of alliances between individuals within and outside of various indigenous groups (Ibid: 477).

One activity that Jackson implemented among Native Alaskans is Reindeer husbandry (Fair 2000: 481). Domesticated animals and agricultural development would create a more sedentary lifestyle. Jackson later went on to become the First Commissioner of Education in Alaska (Flanders 1984:143). Politically funded by the American government, Jackson created schools, which he then staffed with Protestant missionaries (Ibid: 154). Though the transition to Christianity may have seemed a slow process the Inupiat picked up ritual and worship activities relatively quickly (Flanders 1984: 145).

Burch states that not one event led to the mass acceptance of Christianity over generations. Instead he points out some key themes which had a dynamic influence on the spread of Christianity both Orthodox and Protestant among others. Whalers, traders and trappers aided in depleting resources, which Native Alaskans relied upon creating a hardship on subsistence. Disease brought via colonizers led to a drastic population drop,



which then in turn created a political and social structural imbalance (Burch 1994: 10). The Inupiat believed in *uivaqsaat*, a concept implying that the souls of the dead returned bringing with them everything people would ever need, leading them to expect that possible change was coming (Ibid: 12). Burch also states that the Inupiat worldview was centered on a “materialistic” mindset, for example health, weather, food etc. Christianity on the other hand was based on a more “moralistic” principle (Ibid: 12). Burch suggests that the Inupiat accepted Christianity yet could not fully switch over to a moralistic approach and combined the two ideologies into a belief that if an individual was good and followed Christian law one would be given good health, and fortune.

### *Healing Hands*

In many instances missionaries were said to have healing powers. Missionaries treated and cared for the sick (diseases like small pox, influenza, and measles), starving (during harsh winters), and the orphaned, creating a trust and somewhat of a protector complex (Williams 2009: 160). Black states when shamans could not heal someone that individual would be taken to a missionary. I would like to note however that not all individuals would have access to missionary aid. In the cases with missionary care, priests would heal not only through medicinal means but also through spiritual baptisms. Those who were healed then became of great help in spreading religion, because the individual has an emic perspective and may hold more influence within a cultural group than an outsider would. Also Alaskan Natives traveled more than missionaries did, thus they were better able to spread religious word in many ways than missionaries

themselves (Black 2004: 225). Missionaries were viewed as “[the] Instrument in the hands of the great Physician, in whose hands alone are the issues of life” (PHS, RG 1895: 301.3–8–73). In this statement missionaries became a medium through which the creator, can heal. The symbolism of the hand is still important today and I will later expand on the influence of healing hands within my own research on Pentecostalism.<sup>2</sup>

Often missionary success is accredited with the use of medicine and the ability to heal. However when missionaries first entered Alaska they brought with them numerous diseases. Black illustrates that in 1838 the Russian American Company (RAC) introduced a vaccine to the Native population to guard against the smallpox virus (Black 1984: 36-37). Soon after the virus began to spread, most people who had been inoculated survived, however the Inupiat blamed the Russian vaccine for the outbreak. Later blame faded, but it is important to remember that although missionaries often came with medicinal cures they also were carriers for disease and were often seen as ambiguously wielding a sort of power over health. This is a similar outlook of shamanism, the shaman has power over health, and weather but he is not inherently good or bad. Even though the shaman is seen as ambiguous he/she “is above all a healer” (de Heusch 1971: 153).

### *The Comity Agreement*

One of the largest Christian missionary efforts within Alaskan came about in the late 1800’s with the institution of the Comity agreement. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century several

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<sup>2</sup> Many religious figures cross culturally use their hands in an effort to heal both spiritual and physical wounds. Body language and physical touch can be seen as symbolic and ritualistic in nature. The use of the hands as a medium for healing is often a religious ritual act even today. The emphasis on healing and the use of hands to do so in a religious or spiritual manner may have in part created continuity across the religious spectrum in Alaska. It is then possible that this continuity lead to the acceptance of Pentecostalism as a new religious movement more successful.

Christian missionary groups decided that to best serve the Alaskan territory, with little argument over mission settlements, would be to get together and split up the land and assign specific regions to the main protestant denominations at the time (Williams 2009). Sheldon Jackson headed this meeting of religious leaders in the 1880's (Ibid: 152). According to Williams the Alaskan frontier was divided between five denominations: 1) Presbyterian, 2) Methodists, 3) Baptists, 4) Episcopalians, and 5) Moravians (153). The Presbyterians were given Southeastern Alaska including Point Barrow; the Methodists concentrated their efforts in the Aleutian and Shumagin islands while the Baptists settled into Kodiak and the Cook Inlet region. The Episcopalians influenced the Yukon valley and the Moravians sought to evangelize the interior (Kusko Kwim and Nuishagak territories). Not only was this action sanctioned and funded by the government it was also publicly fueled as well (Ibid: 153).

Now the Moravian missions held similar techniques to that of the Russian priests. The Moravians actually learned Yup'ik with the idea that speaking the native language would aid in the evangelization process, which in effect helped in the preservation of the language. The Moravian missionaries were among the first to use Yup'ik converts as "helpers" to spread Moravian influence among the native population (Williams 2009: 155).

Quakers came onto the scene in the late 1880's in the Kobuk region (Ibid: 156). They followed the American model of missionization. Quakers believed in an English only mission strategy in order to cleanse and convert the indigenous people fully to western ideals and Christianity. Often when cultures are faced with such change they will

keep some traditions and absorb new beliefs (PC Christianity in this case and many others due to colonization/westernization) into older practices/worship. An outside example of this is Haitian Vodou, which over the course of Western colonization has incorporated Catholic saints within traditional worship of supernatural spirits (McCarthy Brown 2001).

### 3.2: Brief History of Pentecostalism

#### *Beginnings*

The term Pentecostal has Greek etymology “the fiftieth” which “refers to the fiftieth day after the second day of the Jewish festival of Passover” (Coleman 2004: 20). In the Bible it states that during the first century AD it is said that several disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:4 provides the foundation for modern Pentecostalism. In the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) the Biblical verse reads,

“When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying, And tongues, like flames of fire that were divided, appeared to them and rested on each one of them. Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages, as the Spirit gave them ability for speech” (Acts 2:1-4).

The passage indicates that the Christian disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, which gifted them glossolalia. Through the centuries speaking in tongues was mistrusted.

Pentecostalism did not emerge as an organized religion until the twentieth century for this reason. Even though there was not a large movement there were still small groups who believed in the events of Pentecost and emphasized glossolalia and the embodiment of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Late Nineteenth Century to Modern*

In the late 1800's into the early 1900's Pentecostal belief began to emerge in the United States. Coleman indicates that PC origins appear to have significant "black, slave roots" (2004: 21). PC Christianity shows distinct similarities with African heritage for example the importance of "orality, musicality, narrativity in theology and witness, emphasis on maximum participation, inclusion of dreams and visions in worship, understanding of correspondence between body and mind and antiphonal character of worship services" (Coleman 2004: 21; See also Hollenweger 1997: 18-19). The slave trade among other factors created a movement of peoples as well as religious practices and ideology, particularly in North America. Later Pentecostal Christians were among the first groups, at a time of segregation, to bridge the division of race. Even so, group unity happened more so during times of revival and spiritual phenomena.

According to Robbins many scholars mistakenly associate PC Christianity with fundamentalism (2004: 122; see also Stoll 1990). Few other Christian groups would have

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of embodiment refers to the Holy Spirit taking up residence within the believer influencing their behaviors, communicating and guiding the individual. In some instances a form of spiritual possession occurs in which the Holy Spirit from within the individual acts as a "bridge" in which God can speak and act through. At this point the individual experiences a shift in their state of being which will be discussed later.

any affiliation with “tongues speakers” (Albrecht 1999: 35). Albrecht is a theologian who often uses the term “fundamentalist,” this is a loaded term especially within sociocultural studies. For this reason I would like to provide clarity in this matter. As William Beeman points out fundamentalism is often used to describe Evangelical Christians. Beeman states,

“It [fundamentalism] came to embody both principles of absolute religious orthodoxy and evangelical practice which called for believers to extended action beyond religion into political and social life” (Beeman 2002: 129).

The term fundamentalism has roots in the early 1900’s. *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of the Truth*, a twelve volume series, was created by American Protestant theologians to defend criticism of orthodox Protestant belief as well as affirm what they deemed to be *fundamental* to Christianity (Beeman 2002). In his work on Christian belief James Barr illustrates that there are four basic elements of fundamentalism. 1) Scripture as infallible, 2) Salvation of the individual, 3) Personal witness and 4) Inadequate interpretation of scripture (Barr 1977).<sup>4</sup> In both Beeman and Barr’s concepts of fundamentalism PC Christianity can be lumped in, which is misleading. More recent scholarly works illustrate that similarities exist between PC Christianity and fundamentalist believers however there is a sharp disagreement in doctrinal interpretation. Robbins discusses fundamentalism as,

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<sup>4</sup> A fundamentalist in this case is an individual who adheres strictly to dogmatic principles, particularly Biblical liturgy. The emergent 20<sup>th</sup> century Pentecostal religious movement received various criticisms from both the general public and other Christian denominations for their use of charismatic gifts.

“relying on the widespread doctrine that the gifts of the Spirit ceased to be available to people after they were given to the Apostles during the original Pentecost, from the outset firmly rejected Pentecostalism.

Fundamentalists today cling to this rejection” (Robbins 2004: 123).

To be clear PC Christianity is not fundamentalist in nature, though they do share commonalities. Fundamentalist theory is strongly against the charismatic gifting’s in today’s society, which is a key element within Pentecostal belief.

In the 1960’s the rise of Neo-Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement created charismatic renewal in American Christianity (Albrecht 1999: 36). Charismatic renewal is defined by Peter Hocken, a Roman Catholic scholar, as “the occurrence of distinctively Pentecostal blessings and phenomena, baptism in the Holy Spirit with the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, outside a denominational and/or confessional Pentecostal framework” (Hocken 1988: 130). Protestant groups as well as Catholicism witnessed the renewal (eg: The second Vatican Council) with Charismatic communities emerging all over the United States (Albrecht 1999: 37-38). Albrecht indicates that nondenominational Charismatic churches increased between the 1960’s and 1970’s (Ibid: 38).

As Pentecostalism took off in the first half of the twentieth century leaders began to form differing opinions regarding Biblical theology, causing several schisms among Pentecostals. For example ‘Oneness’ Pentecostalism does not believe in the Holy Trinity with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Instead they believe that God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are just a variety of names for one being (MacCulloch 2009: 959-960; Coleman

2004). Pentecostal branches like the Assemblies of God Church remained Trinitarians. Though several Churches exist with varying ideologies one thing remains relatively constant, the Pentecostal liturgy regarding the Holy Spirit Baptism, speaking in tongues and other gifts of the Spirit, and the second coming of Christ.

Some refer to modern Pentecostalism as neo-Pentecostals<sup>5</sup> (Westerlund 2009: 1). Rausch 2010 has characterized three waves of conversion to PC Christianity. The first wave represents classical Pentecostal beliefs placing a “priority on conversion, baptism in the Holy Spirit, and the Charismatic gifts, especially tongues...” (930). The second wave came about when other religious denominations began emulating Pentecostalism; this took place in the 1950-1960’s with primary focus on healing and exorcisms (Rausch 2010: 930). The third, more recent wave is the Neo-Pentecostal or Neo-Charismatics, whom are “concerned with a struggle against evil spirits and the devil, they stress miraculous cures, exorcisms, and many preach the ‘prosperity gospel’” (Rausch 2010: 931). All three waves show continuous value in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues as a sign in some capacity of the influence of the divine Spirit. In Full Gospel Pentecostal theology, which are carried out in all of these waves: a) Jesus offers salvation; b) Jesus heals; c) Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit; d) Jesus is coming again (Robbins 2004: 121).

Pentecostals of the twentieth century considered themselves as practitioners of authentic Christianity. These Christians have gone back through biblical history “in order

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<sup>5</sup> Neo-Pentecostalism also known as Charismatic Renewal is a more enthusiastic movement emerging in the 1960’s. Neo-Pentecostalism is Evangelistic and digresses from the formerly prominent classical or sectarian approach to religion (Quebedeaux 1976: 5).



to embody the beliefs and practices of the original” believers (Coleman 2004: 21). However there are two main instances in which Pentecostalism owes its reemergence to: the spiritual events of Bethel Bible College via Charles Parham and the influence of William Seymour in the Azusa Street Revival. In both instances the Holy Spirit Baptism is expressed through the phenomena of speaking in tongues. The charismatic gifts are of equal significance to one another and said to be rather specific to each believer. It is worth noting that in my research participants saw spiritual gifts such as discernment and healing are of equal value to tongues, although many believers do seek glossolalia and it is possible to have multiple gifting’s in the spirit.

#### *Bethel Bible College*

In 1900 Charles Fox Parham formed the Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas (Blumhofer 1993: 47-49). It was here that Parham began preaching for a more spiritual experience within Christianity, “a living Christianity” (Ibid: 46; see also Nichol 1966: 27). Parham did not simply wish to follow the Bible he wanted to live it and experience God, with a filling or oneness with the Holy Spirit.

In the late nineteenth century Parham preached Baptism in the Spirit as a primary form of baptism. A key figure in the formation of Pentecostalism was Frank Sandford, a Baptist Pastor. Parham followed the teachings of Sandford who emphasized the Holy Ghost as a primary instructor in an individual’s life, and the importance of religious restoration, which highlighted healing, holiness, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Blumhofer 1993: 48-94). Parham used these same core ideals in his own school.

Early 1901 Agnes Ozman, one of Parham's students, spoke in another language. It is said that she spoke Chinese for three days in that time when she would try to write it would come out as characters of another language (Blumhofer 1993: 51). Ozman and others saw this as a sign of the baptism in the Holy Spirit as well as a gift that would help her in her evangelizing missions to foreign lands (Ibid: 52). Soon others began speaking in tongues and illustrating intense spiritual phenomena. At this point Parham's school began to draw negative attention, participants were described as crazy (Ibid: 52-53). Soon after these attacks Parham's school fragmented at which time he traveled to Topeka, Kansas. Here he continued to preach the importance of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Parham did find success in Kansas and the Midwest where he traveled around healing people through faith and prayer. Nichols notes that by 1905 "Pentecostal" or "Full Gospel" groups existed in the several towns across Kansas, Missouri and Texas (1966: 31). Though Parham is a key player in the foundation of Pentecostalism it is William Seymour who is considered to be the father of this new Christian denomination.

### *Azusa Street*

William Seymour having preached with Parham in Houston, Texas, and followed the idea of baptism in the Holy Spirit and the notion of speaking in tongues. Seymour was later invited to preach in a Los Angeles church (Blumhofer 1993: 55). In Los Angeles Seymour began preaching about the full gospel with specific mention of Spiritual Baptism. In 1906 Seymour told congregants that not only could congregants achieve Holy Spirit baptism but they would demonstrate signs like glossolalia as the

disciples had in Acts 2:4 (Nichol 1966: 32). This theme is among one of the most defining Pentecostal ideologies that Biblical phenomena can and does happen today as in the days of old (e.g. Pentecost), and that a true baptism would be evident via some sort of spiritual gift like tongues (Ibid: 32; see also Synan 1971: 104). Seymour offended several church members by telling them they had not yet experienced a true baptism in the Spirit.

Though Seymour was not welcome at the Nazarene Church he was taken in by a few church members, having nowhere else to go. He began to preach in their home. One-night seven attendants began speaking in tongues, attracting curiosity from the surrounding community. Soon there were too many people for the small home to house, so Seymour found an old Methodist Church and converted it into his new Church (Synan 1971: 106-7). “Seymour emphasized repentance, restitution, sanctification, healing, Spirit baptism as ‘a gift of power upon the sanctified life,’ and the imminent return of Christ” (Blumhofer 1993: 59). It was at this Church on Azusa Street, California that a massive revival took place.

Many of the participants in the Azusa Street spiritual awakening viewed this revival as a sign of the second coming of Christ (Blumhofer 1993: 60). Synan writes, “Scores of people began to ‘fall under the power’ and arise speaking in other tongues” (1971: 107). The Azusa Church became the main subject in the media, people were described as crazy and disturbed yet more and more people began to believe. As I mentioned previously, believers began to view the revival as the end of days, soon after on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1901 a devastating earthquake struck San Francisco. At this time even more people, believer and non-believers came to the Azusa Street Church, the earthquake

quickly became a spiritual sign of what was yet to come (Ibid: 107-8). About five years after Parham, 1906 brought adherence numbers to new heights; some thirteen thousand individuals had reportedly spoken in tongues and received the true Spirit baptism (Blumhofer 1993: 61).

The movement continued spreading quickly through the United States and into foreign regions, which were seen as “high-risk” areas in need of evangelism. One of the fastest growing denominations within modern Pentecostalism is the Assembly of God Church. To sustain growth and send missions teams to these “high-risk” regions a monetary fund is needed.

As Pentecostalism has taken on a global influence they have linked into political and economic ventures (MacCulloch 2009: 961). Pentecostalism today shares the same capitalistic drive as its mother denomination, Protestantism. Having political and business connections help aid the flow of Pentecostal cultural ideology into greater society.

Toward the end of my time as the First Assembly of God I attended a Sunday service led by the new senior pastor where he conducted a “Fireside Chat.”<sup>6</sup> During this session he talked with a local politician and fellow church member. As the talk went on the new pastor stressed the need for Christians to become engaged in political ventures as well as active in community and the world in general. Though I will not explore the political dimension of Pentecostalism I do find it important to mention. Today both neo and classical Pentecostalism are present in mainline PC Christianity.

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<sup>6</sup> In 1932 Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) became the 32<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States. In response to the Great Depression FDR proposed numerous social works, political and economic projects to help bolster the nation. To gain public support for these projects as well as ease the minds of the population FDR began a talk series over the radio called “Fireside Chat.” During these “chats” the president spoke informally to the public regarding policies and projects which to lead the country out of its current state (NARA 2013).

### 3.3: Assembly of God Church (AG)

#### *Brief History*

In 1909 a group of ministers unattached to a specific Pentecostal denomination met at Dothan, Alabama for three days the group came together to form a new Pentecostal group (Nichol 1966: 110). The title of this group, The Church of God in Christ, was not solidified until 1913. Another group had the same name; permission had to be given to use The Church of God in Christ title (Ibid: 110). In 1914 in Hot Springs, Arkansas, the Church of God in Christ members and ministers met for a better understanding of church doctrine, to learn how to maintain God's work both domestic and foreign, missionary endeavors and funding, chartering churches, and "to consider the establishment of a Bible training school with a literary division" (Nichol 1966: 110; Shoaps 2002: 36). As a result of this meeting the group began to identify itself as the Assemblies of God. The Assemblies of God is one of the most prominent examples of mainline Pentecostalism.

#### *Beliefs*

The Assemblies of God follow the Bible with a seemingly literal interpretation, however the AG also adapt well to society throughout time and geographical location. There are several key elements within AG religious belief/worship. One of the most notable and recognizable within Pentecostalism is the prosperity gospel.

The prosperity gospel is also referred to as the Health and Wealth Movement (Coleman 2004: 27). In my research, it was most commonly referred to as the prosperity gospel. What this means is that a true believer who lives a righteous life has access to divine power.

“As a born again Christian, the believer is a possessor of faith, and learns to draw upon new-found power not only through obedience to God, but also through specific acts that draw divine influence into the world” (Coleman 2004: 28).

The main idea behind this gospel is that God will provide for his people (believers). Priscilla Shirer stated that God would equip the believer for the dry seasons of their lives, “God equips the Called.” This statement correlates to the prosperity gospel in that God will provide for his followers, giving them what they need at a time when they need it most. This ideology can be very attractive to newcomers who are experiencing a “dry season” in their lives. To summarize, the Holy Spirit provides Charismatic gifts to equip believers in their service to God. These gifts only come through devotion and faith after which the filling with the Holy Spirit will equip the individual.

The prosperity gospel provides the idea that when a believer is faithful and true he/she will yield “fruit” or wealth in life whether material or social<sup>7</sup> in manner. Using Coleman’s theory of “positive thinking” (1993) Dan Liroy<sup>8</sup> states, “there is an implicit confidence in the power of ‘positive confession’ in which faith enables what believers

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<sup>7</sup> Social wealth can be seen as health, family, love and happiness. These are social elements of wealth that cannot be quantified.

<sup>8</sup> Dan Liroy is a scholar in historical and philosophical theology.

think and say to become actualized realities” (2007: 42). When a participant is truly faithful they have access to the supernatural powers of the divine through the embodiment of the Holy Spirit (Ibid: 42 see also Hunt 2000). According to Stephen Hunt, a sociologist and scholar in religious studies, the “health and prosperity gospel [is] one of the fastest growing religious movements on a global scale” (Hunt 2000: 73). It is the opinion of many scholars (Coleman 1993, Hunt 2000, Lioy 2007) that the Faith movement spreads due in great part to the idea of prosperity and participant seeming accessibility to wealth. I suggest that increase in Pentecostal participation has a ritual/worship component that has not been explored as in-depth.

#### *Mission Statement*

Today the Assemblies of God (AG) have spread throughout the United States and across the globe. Modern technology and media have facilitated AG efforts to evangelize the world. The AG mission statement is as follows: “The Assemblies of God is committed to fulfilling a four-fold mission. Our primary reason for being is to: 1) Evangelize the lost, 2) Worship God, 3) Disciple believers, 4) Show compassion” (ag.org/top/). As of November 2009, 12,500 AG churches existed in the United States alone, with well over sixty-five million adherents worldwide (ag.org/top/). The Assemblies of God now makes up the largest Pentecostal denomination in the World (ag.org/top/).

*Practices*

Throughout this MA Thesis I will attempt to illustrate various beliefs and practices of the First Assembly of God Church, an Assemblies of God denomination. One of the most essential practices within the AG is Holy Spirit Baptism, where the spiritual essence of the Holy Spirit is welcomed into a believer solidifying the bond between individual and deity.

In Acts 2:38 Peter declares that any who repent and are baptized in the name of Christ are able to receive the gift of the Spirit within them. In Scripture John the Baptist stated that the coming of Christ would baptize people with the Holy Spirit (Quebedeaux 1976: 11). Through Spirit Baptism followers may receive gifts specific to the individual. Most Pentecostal Charismatics believe that tongues is an effect of a true filling of the Holy Spirit, it is also a spiritual gifting. There is a large list of spiritual gifts which I will discuss in a later chapter. The main three are glossolalia, prophecy and healing. Spiritual gifts refer to all of the miraculous powers or phenomena possessed by Christians through the divinity (Ibid: 13). The spiritual gifting is characterized as Charismatic gifts.

The term charisma is Greek in origin and translates to “gracious gifts” or “gifts of grace” (Burgess 2001: 86; see also MacCulloch 2009: 913). Within Pentecostalism “charismata” refers to spiritual gifts given to the individual from God through the Holy Spirit (MacCulloch 2009: 101-102). This is then backed up through scripture among other modes to authenticate the message as being from the divine.



*3.3.1 First Assemblies in Alaska.* The First Assembly is located in downtown Fairbanks. With this central location the First Assembly managed to amass a congregation of 150-200 people. In the summer the numbers are closer to 300 according to Mary Beth Rucci (the pastor's wife and head of the Church daycare). This is due to those who have summerhouses here or are visiting on vacation. The congregation is mostly non-native Alaskan. The large open sanctuary space is equipped with technological gadgets and speakers, which echo through the room.

The Fairbanks First Assembly of God is a branch of the Assemblies of God organization. Over the years the Church has continued to expand and update with the newest forms of technology to project their message on a more global scale. In October 1939 Charles and Emma Hirschy came to Fairbanks to “plant” a new church (see Appendix C-1). “Planting” is a term used by Pentecostals meaning creating a new church. At this time travel was not nearly as technologically advanced as today. Charles Hirschy is said to have hitchhiked to Seattle from Arkansas then took a boat up to Alaska. Within about six years the log church was built and services began. In 1971 Fairbanks witnessed a revival, where numerous individuals were ‘saved’ with baptism in the Holy Spirit (see Appendix C-2). The church moved several times throughout the years until taking root on Airport way in 1976 (see of Appendix C-3).

Pentecostal practitioners are members of other larger socio-cultural identities, in this case both Alaskan and American. They also belong to a smaller religious sub-culture. religion. PC Christians have their own culture though within a certain region variations will emerge. For example, Fairbanks PC Christianity will share the same core beliefs and practices with the mainline Assemblies of God, however they possess perspectives and practices, which have formed through the synthesis of Christianity with Alaskan native cultural aspects.

#### 4.1: Connection between Churches

##### *Connection*

Uncharacteristically, Fairbanks Protestant churches often join together. Pastor Rucci told me that he has gone for coffee and shared meals, conversing with various other ministers, pastors and etc. For example Fairbanks' Lutheran, Baptist and other Protestant as well as Catholic churches will come together each month, rotating between churches, taking part in a collective food pantry effort. Each church takes a turn and all the others collect goods in a collaborative effort. Pastor Rucci states,

“Somebody, and I don't know when, before I got here, figured out that each individual church has a food pantry. It is pretty normal most churches have food pantries, to give to the poor, benevolence. But somebody figured out, ya know, if we pooled our resources here, we could do a lot more for the community for the hungry than we can individually. So now there are a whole bunch of us, we are part of a whole bunch of churches

here. And we all come together, and we actually rotate whose building we are going to use month to month year round and we distribute food that we collect to the needy and we probably give out 3,000 boxes of groceries... And just at this church, so all the other churches do probably the equivalent. Umm, there are people that get their food from the food bank every week and that is all they have. It is a cooperative effort between Fairbanks Lutheran, us [First Assembly of God Church] and a few others. I don't know all the different churches so, you just never see that in the South" (Field notes: Rucci interview 2012).<sup>9</sup>

With the connection between churches more people could be helped and more foodstuffs are given per individual/family. Rucci speculates that the churches' coming together has to do with Alaska in general being secluded. Rucci states that it is not prevalent to find churches working together often churches, even those in the same denomination (eg: the Assemblies of God) will argue over religious details and liturgy. Holiday celebrations also bring the churches together. The largest event is Easter because it is a commemoration of the resurrection of Christ. According to pastor Rucci Easter sports the largest church attendance. On Easter, the several churches come together and put on a production acting out the passion of Christ. Sometimes live animals are used and a dinner follows. The drama production is usually produced by an amalgamation of church adherents from the various churches. The worship groups from each church unit and the music and festivities are conducted with a collaborative theme. According to the pastor

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<sup>9</sup> After this interview I was informed that Catholic churches also take part in the food banks' mission.

and other members this is relatively unique, in much of the world even between religious leaders of the same denomination do not unite, whereas I have heard and experienced not only leaders of Assemblies of God working together but also other churches. Often churches become competitive with one another, yet Fairbanks Protestant groups work together.

The collaborative effort between varying Protestant denominations is extremely unusual. Pastor Rucci said that in his experience he has never seen such a good connection between churches. He also illustrated that in the lower 48 states he has never seen or heard of anything similar to the cooperative efforts, which exist and thrive in Alaska. Other participants have shared with me that they have seen collaboration between churches elsewhere but not to the degree demonstrated in the Fairbanks community.

Rucci among other members expressed sadness at the divisions between the various Christian groups. Catholicism among other Christian branches often discredits Pentecostal Charismatic worship and the speaking of tongues (MacCulloch 2009; Smith 1998; Flora 1976). The rivalry between branches of Christianity is as timeless as Christianity itself. Thus it is rather extraordinary to see such a collaborative effort in Fairbanks, though I am not making the assumption that this level of collaboration is found only in Alaska. In this case the collective Christian efforts are among Protestant denominations.

The connection between the various Protestant churches in Fairbanks, Alaska is noteworthy however within this research project there is not sufficient data to expand further upon this interdenominational collaboration. The First Assembly demonstrates a

lot of fluidity both within the church and its outside relationship with the community and other churches. This adaptive element makes Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity easily mobile. Before exploring the mobility it is equally important to understand the role of membership within Pentecostal churches, who are the people who make up the backbone of the church.

#### 4.2: Membership

Religious membership is fluid because it paradoxically involves commitment. Religious membership is a large commitment and an important decision for most church participants, yet it is which is why most adherents are not officially church members. According to my informants when adherents become members it is because they enjoy and agree with the ritual practices and worship of the First Assembly. Many scholars view the prosperity gospel as a main draw for individuals in adopting the Pentecostal faith. With this research I suggest that people participate and become active members wanting a more intense and personal relationship with God.

##### *Who is a member?*

Anyone can become a member of the church. It is a personal choice once an individual decides he/she agrees with the Assemblies of God liturgy and Pentecostal belief. It usually takes quite a few years for individuals to gain membership; in some ways it is a public declaration of where your religious allegiance lies. Since most

participants are from other religions it may take them some time to be sure this is their true desire for their spiritual life.

This is not to say that a member cannot leave and go to another church within Pentecostal denominations or other religions. There is a process by which the member asks the church to release their membership to another church. The membership can either be transferred to another Assembly of God or Pentecostal Church or relinquished if the individual switches to another religious group that will not accept the transference. I will expand on this below when I discuss church planting. In this case the church will send members to plant a church in order to give the church the best chance of success possible.

There are some situations in which a participant will not have access to a religious institution or simply does not want to transfer the membership but rather to just dissolve it. In these instances the pastor will try to lead strays from his “flock” (follower(s)) back to the fold. The individual usually leaves the church to better understand his/her personal beliefs, generally rejoining the church at a later time.

#### *How to become a member*

Pastor Rucci stated that when a participant becomes a member they must “sign a covenant stating that they will faithfully support the ministries of the church, tithe, pray for the pastors and the church and participate in the ministry.” This varies from church to church, however the ideology is generally the same. The participant must be a true believer and take their role within the church and community as of utmost importance.

*What are the responsibilities of a member?*

Members have the opportunity to vote for electing board members, pastors, and for general changes to the church constitution and bylaws. There is no other real responsibility, but members are encouraged to participate in church functions and volunteer for event committees as well as teaching youth and adult classes. The church may hold the covenant but God holds the contract thus there is a spiritual element that makes this decision a serious one.

*Fluidity of membership*

As illustrated above, religious memberships, especially in such active Charismatic groups like the Assembly of God, are a declaration by the individual to God and to the church community. These agreements are seemingly static in their own right, holding the individual to the covenant via supernatural powers. However I witnessed that there is a fluidity in which membership can transition from church to church, be it Pentecostal or not. People in general move from church to church until they find a good fit. Every individual I spoke to about this stated that once they came to the First Assembly they stayed because it was “home.”

When there is a change some participants will leave in search of other Pentecostal churches, usually desiring to stay within such an active religious community with a Spirit infused worship. In Fairbanks alone there are several Assemblies of God churches. Churches are fluid entities staffed with individuals who adapt with the time and

technology ever changing to keep their believers “awake” and “alive” in the worship of an omnipresent deity. New churches are planted often, pastors move between churches, building a church then moving on to establish another. Appendix A shows the number of new churches opened from 1965 to 2012. There is a distinct fluidity within the a) First Assembly, b) Assemblies of God, c) and one would assume greater Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity.

When I conducted my fieldwork the church was in the midst of a pastoral change. The previous senior pastor had left and pastor Rucci was acting pastor, when Pastor Phillips was selected as new senior pastor there was another shift. Through pastoral alteration members came and left with each change. Before I began, in early 2011, Rucci told me that the adherents numbered between three and four hundred. While I attended the numbers dropped down between two hundred and two hundred fifty adherents including children. In the summer months more people would attend, those who come to live in summerhouses or were on vacation. Adherents and members alike move between churches following pastors seeking worship, which will lead to the ultimate connection with the Holy Spirit.



### 4.3: Mobility and Church Planting

“The term movement...implies that numbers of people have joined forces in more or less concerted effort on a common project. This supposes a goal that is aimed at and a deliberate pursuit of that goal; usually it connotes a considerable degree of organization and method...” (O’Connor 1971: 33-34).

#### *Pentecostalism as a Global Movement*

Pentecostal and Charismatic (PC) Christianity is first and foremost a religious movement with a strong social component. With the offer of food and aid to the impoverished as well as involvement in both political and economic arenas in society Pentecostal influence is able to spread in a multitude of circuits. Though this apparent social component is worthy of note in the success of PC Christianity, I pose that it is the ritual element that most directly relates to the spread and success of this religious movement.

Success is not gaged necessarily by the influx of participants in PC Christianity. This thesis poses that the success of PC Christianity is also ritual based. For PC converts the goal is to gain closeness with God, the divinity, which is attained through worship and ritual activity. This is what success truly means to a believer, if the participant is not getting what he/she needs spiritually the individual will find another place which better suits his/her spiritual needs. Once the participant finds such a place where he/she achieves a more connected relationship with the divinity, that is “success.” Through PC

ritual and social life an atmosphere is provided, which allows the believer to experience a “true filling of the Spirit” when the Holy Spirit encompasses the believer and forms a direct line of communication between participant and God. This form of success focuses more on the individual level.

Pentecostalism began in the United States yet quickly spread to other continents through both missionaries and through those who became ‘saved.’ Various scholars do not view Pentecostalism as a movement stating that there is no organization or ultimate goal (Quebedeaux 1976: 6). This is a valid argument however through my studies I feel that the Assemblies of God (AG) as a Pentecostal denomination possess the elements of a social movement. The two main goals of the AG is to evangelize the lost, and prepare for the second coming which all AG Churches share. In 1968 the Assemblies of God leaders convened considering a new threefold focus for the denomination. This new purpose consisted of evangelism, worship, and nurture (Blumhofer 1993: 243).

Today there is a high degree of organization. There are several complex layers, which go from pastoral staff and membership to the Assemblies General Council. New churches are planted often and missions’ teams are sent all around the world to achieve their interests in evangelism.

Most individuals become Pentecostal later in life, switching from other Christian denominations. Individuals will often shift from church to church in search of a spiritual connection. “One of the greatest appeals of the new Pentecostal groups is the manner of worship. Services appear spontaneous, experiential and exuberant” (Brouwer et al. 1996: 179). It is this spontaneity both active and intense that gives a participant a feeling of

spiritual drive, creating the desire to become more and more active within the church community.

One theory to explain the global trend is the prosperity gospel in bringing in newcomers. This gospel promotes success in life via religious support. The idea is that God will provide and equip the individual for their life journey, however the individual must remain faithful to the deity. I have been instructed that God is not a talisman for good luck and fortune but illustrated as an omnipresent being that aids the individual through a spiritual infusion (embodiment) between participant and Holy Spirit. Once the believer possesses the Holy Spirit God can guide the individual and help him/her to become Christ-like (a better person). One interviewee told me that the prosperity gospel has been twisted to the point where several members become angered about it.

Though the AG often remained removed from other social changes like women's rights later the AG accepted and ordained women as religious leaders (Blumhofer 1993: 267). Today most Christian branches will not allow women as religious leaders (Protestant-reverend, Catholic-father, etc.) In view of this the AG and other Pentecostal branches show modernization in allowing women a greater role within the religious community. The AG has opened the door to everyone, training and ordaining those who desire it.

### *Religious Specialists*

As I have indicated above Pentecostal religious specialists such as pastors (senior and worship), missionaries and etc. are rather mobile. Because of this fluidity in

leadership it has occurred to me that ritual can stand on its own. Throughout my field research I have watched pastor Rob Rucci, pastor Bob Johnson, missionaries and others lead services, juggling the responsibility from week to week (pastor Rucci was the primary religious leader for the majority of sessions). The ritual aspects of Pentecostal worship do not necessarily require a specific religious specialist. I do not mean to say that no religious leader is necessary. Simply that such a leader is more a facilitator for ritual action, the social lubricant if you will. In his discussion of shamanism/possession de Heusch states the religious leader in these instances “is no more than the organizer of a ritual spectacle...” (1971: 152). Ritual carries on and comes first; the pastor is seemingly interchangeable and often mobile. Although I do believe that pastors are in some ways viewed in some ways as shamans, because the pastor is educated and otherwise experienced in matters of the Spirit. Though individuals often illustrate the ‘power’ to heal, Pastors are specifically sought out as being healers. For example, Pastor Rucci had a brain tumor and went to another pastor for healing. Though I am sure others “laid hands on,” the pastor sent healing vibes and spiritual vitality toward Rucci. Pastor Rucci attributes his good health to the pastor’s healing touch and of course to God for given said pastor the healing touch. When Rucci returned to the doctor the mass was completely gone.

As I have watched the new pastoral staff take over the First Assembly, I have noticed some changes to some of the rituals central to the body of the church. As these rituals have changed several members/adherents have left the church. One ritual, Wednesday night bible study, was done away with and in its place was a group worship

where individuals would pray either individually or in groups regarding a topic proposed by the new pastor. One such topic for example, was political leaders and prayer for good political decisions. When ritual practices are changed that is when participants will uproot and look to other churches in order to find a ritual structure that suits their ritual inclinations better. Religious leaders may be simple facilitators in ritual action however they do have influence and ability to change ritual. If the changes are adopted and work well with the beliefs and lives of the congregation then the new ritual practices will be successful. The opposite is also apparent, if an individual changes a ritual within the church that does not support common interests and beliefs then the members will leave and find another church that does.

### *Church Planting as a Charismatic gift*

In six months of field research I witnessed a couple of members leaving to plant churches. In one case Pastor Rucci, originally the worship pastor, became the senior pastor of the First Assembly while they searched and ultimately found a permanent senior pastor. As fate would have it Rucci was presented with an opportunity to move to his childhood home and create his own church where he could continue being senior pastor. In my interview with Rucci, he told me that their closest friends at First Assembly had decided to go with him on his journey to plant a church in South Carolina. In an interview Rucci provides insight into church planting as a Charismatic gift of the Spirit.

“One of the gifts of the spirit is...is the gift of apostle, and apostles...the apostles were church planters, ya know like Paul and Peter and those guys

went around and they planted churches. So that is part of the gifting of an apostle, is that they plant churches, so there are ministers around the world today who sort of have that apostolic anointing or mantle or whatever church word you want to use but sort of an apostolic gifting. And those guys tend to have a desire, a heart to go plant other churches. And so I have a couple of friends that are that way. And they are pastors of their own churches but they are constantly every couple years they are taking families and money and like lets go plant a church over here, and start new churches and so...” (Field notes: Rucci interview 2012).

This gift of apostle also demonstrates the overall goal to evangelize the world as well as spreading Pentecostalism. Rucci later stated that he would like to plant a church in England where there is little Pentecostal influence and great need for it. Though he would get the church up and running, he would seek a different pastor to take over and run the church. This is rather common among the AG as well as other Pentecostal groups according to Rucci.

The mother church will send the pastor with money and members. Rucci said he would not have been able to buy the building if it were not for the financial aid given from the Fairbanks First Assembly. When a church is planted many times other members or families with also go and help with the establishment of the new church. These members have to follow specific etiquette however. The members are to ask the mother church (which holds their membership) if the membership can be released to another church.

This role of membership occurs when any member of the church leaves, which could be as simple as moving out of the area or finding a church that better suits the individual and so on. Rucci said when this step is skipped new churches will often contact a new member's old church to ask why they left and if it was on good terms, making sure the individual is not troubled.

Through understanding the connection between churches, membership, and mobility a more holistic image appears of the lives of AG participants. An important part of anthropological research is to try to understand ritual practices within the broader context of the individual and society. Which I will go more in depth with in the next chapter.

#### *Other Cultures and Indigenous forms of Pentecostalism*

The spread of PC Christianity quickens through extensive finances and certain conversion techniques such as teaching indigenous peoples who will then spread what they have learned. By helping to create schoolhouses for students in third world countries and staffing these schools with missionaries children learn to read, write, basic hygiene as well as PC Christianity. Individuals are highly encouraged to join mission teams and contribute to the spread of PC Christianity.

The United States acted as a center of PC activity. Through the Azusa revival the United States certainly kick started a reemergence of Pentecostal belief however it still existed in other countries, in small numbers. The United States can seemingly support a higher number of missions' teams economically but that does not mean that they are the

only players in the spread of Pentecostalism on a global scale (Westerlund 2009: 4). It is not only pastors and missionaries who seek to evangelize and support church growth, but the whole congregation of adherents. During my field research there were several “friends and family” services in which everyone was expected to bring someone to share the spiritual experience with. It was hoped that after a service the individual(s) would then come back, inspired by worship and influenced by the Holy Spirit.

In the 1920’s African Pentecostalism spread through sub-Saharan Africa carried by missionaries and even more so African preachers (Westerlund 2009: 5). African preachers know the people in their homeland better than missionaries, thus it is not too surprising that they carry more influence. These African preachers are often trained by Western missionaries, yet incorporate bits of their cultural tradition into liturgy and ritual, which makes the religion more desirable to other Africans thus easing the spread of Pentecostalism. “In many African countries it has become the dominant expression of Christianity” (Anderson 1987: 234).

Throughout the world there are other forms of syncretic PC Christianity. Some cultures take in Pentecostal efforts easily adapting their own cultural ideologies into the Pentecostal framework. In 1977 there was a sudden change in Urapmin culture. During this time the Solomon Islands were experiencing a Pentecostal Charismatic revival movement (Robbins 2010: 643). According to Robbins 2010 this movement migrated over the Papua New Guinea highlands spreading quickly through indigenous groups (643). The Urapmin came upon the PC movement at a regional bush Bible college where



they became “possessed by the Holy Spirit” (Ibid: 643). This legitimized the PC movement in the region and further expanded the influence through native populations.

Africa, Latin American, China and Indonesia are often placed in the spotlight for Pentecostal growth because they have large populations of non-Christians attracting missionary efforts. However in Sweden, Stockholm possessed the largest Pentecostal congregation until the 60’s, and Finland also presented a large Pentecostal following (Westerlund 2009: 7). According to Anderson (2004), Indonesia, the Philippines, and South Korea combined have approximately 150 million Pentecostals; Latin America is the only other region that rivals these numbers (Anderson 2004: 123; Westerlund 2009). There is fluidity in Pentecostalism; it spreads quickly and almost with a natural ease.

### *Alaskan Influence*

Indigenous forms of Pentecostalism exist in Alaska as well as in Africa, China, Indonesia, and etc. Social collaboration and collective community assistance are behaviors, which can be tied to the North. In the past Native Alaskans were non-sedentary, in this way Alaskan mobility fits into the mobility aspect of PC Christianity. Pastor Rucci even mentions Fairbanks as having a specific “friendly” culture that may be considered linked to indigenous values. The Inupiat, a traditionally egalitarian group, often shared goods, food and other resources throughout the group (Fair 2000: 477). This sharing and respect given to others has given the Inupiat the reputation of being “friendly” in nature. As Jean Briggs (ethnographer in the Arctic) illustrates in *Never in*

*Anger*, the Utku see emotional control as extremely important as well as sharing with the group (Briggs 1970:47).

Fairbanks is also home to several military installations. Several different groups of people coalesce in Fairbanks. There are military personnel, native Alaskans, and students from across the world. With the movement and introduction of new people and ideas the culture of Fairbanks both socially and religiously is in a flux state, adapting through time.

### *Media*

As I stated earlier technology has become a key factor in modern Pentecostalism especially in mobility. With the Internet readily available, individuals can view services online or read about upcoming events. Many religious leaders and pastors keep in touch and support one another thus creating this web of networking over long distances. The new senior pastor at the First Assembly, Mark Phillips, used a program called Skype that allowed both pastor Phillips and the congregation to see and hear each other, so that he could attend service and converse with his new congregation while literally across the country in Florida. As Rucci readied to move his family once again, Pastor Phillips told the congregation that this was not goodbye and that the two churches would remain interconnected and support one another. Skype and other internet/technology features add a virtual aspect to mobility, which in modern times is important not to overlook.

Through the years the AG has championed an “old time” message, which has been furthered through advances in modern technology. In keeping up with technology and adapting to the change of society through the years the AG produces an ever-

modernized Pentecostal experience (Blumhofer 1993: 251). The Internet presents one of the largest communities creating a huge public space to convert into a Christian environment (Fairbanks First Assembly of God, 2013). Individuals can access services online as well as communicate with church staff and members. According to Meyer,

“...the world is the ultimate space that needs to be filled, and many churches develop global outreach programs that materialize through Web sites, international crusades and prayer meetings, and new networks instigated from Africa, Latin America, or Asia” (2010: 120).

Media such as the Internet, radio, television and film, and etc. have created a more tangible global connection between individuals. Bible Studies are now often conducted with a video segment allowing a teaching/message to be played and experienced by anyone and everyone. With this new media stream people can access religious liturgy via audio and visual technologies. Several congregants no longer carry an actual Bible with them they have no need because there is now an application for phones in which one can just pull up the passage they wish to recite or read. The use of various media's like Skype have played a role as a facilitator in the spread of Pentecostalism both in the United States and abroad.

## Chapter 5: An Ethnographer in the Assembly

I conducted six months of field research among Pentecostal Churches in various areas of Alaska. I began my research in Delta Junction and Homer field sites in 2011<sup>10</sup>. The distance between sites quickly became an issue, thus I decided that my primary fieldwork would be conducted at the First Assembly of God Church in Fairbanks, Alaska. I used two main tools of data production: participant observation and interviews. I favor face-to-face interaction with informants. In doing so I gained a plethora of qualitative information, which I found appropriate for this MA research project. In addition the Church conducted surveys from which I could glean information.

I did find that my research is skewed toward women's perspective as I spent more time with the women of the church. In my experience there are differences concerning religious ritual between genders, though I will not focus on this for the purposes of this thesis, it is worth mentioning for future research. Many of the events I attended with the First Assembly were often segregated, for example Women's Bible Study, the Women's Retreat, Handprint, and the Quilting Circle just to name a few.

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<sup>10</sup> I received a fellowship with the Alaska Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR), which helped greatly with research equipment and travel expenses.

### 5.1: Participant Observation in a PC Community

Participant observation is a methodological technique and tools established in part by Bronislaw Malinowski (Malinowski 1922). Barnard (2000) defines participant observation as: “the fieldwork methodology in which the ethnographer learns through both observation and participation in the social life of the people under study” (206).

I began my field research with participant observation on a Wednesday night attending a Bible Study at the First Assembly Church. I had come in through the wrong entrance, which led to the staff offices. In doing so I met the pastor and much of the Church staff. Pastor Rob Rucci and some of the other staff members seemed rather interested in my research and the thought of me joining them for services. In going to the Wednesday night bible study I was able to meet a small group of participants, which gave me an idea of how people would react to my presence when I began attending church functions. It was also a good way to get my feet wet as far as fieldwork goes. I was a little frightened to go into a room filled with people I did not know. Meeting with a small group of participants was more comfortable. This is the experience for many newcomers. Most of the participants I have spoken with have come to the First Assembly through the advice of a friend who already attends the church.

Once the Bible Study ended I asked the pastor’s wife, Mary Beth Rucci, if she would show me where the service would be held on Sunday and if I could sit with her. She was delighted that I asked and for the majority of services I attended, I sat with her. The first service I attended was a little awkward for me. I was not sure what to expect. As

I walked in I was handed a pamphlet regarding the topic of the day and weekly events. There was about an hour of worship. Worship involved about an hour of singing and music as people gradually made their way into their seats. The sequence of events differs from service to service, but there is always time dedicated to new attendants. I was called out amongst a large congregation. I held up my hand, illustrating that it was my first time there, at the insistence of my new friends. The church gives every newcomer a free water bottle or a coffee travel mug; each contains information about the church and an opinion survey regarding the service and asking about the interest level of the newcomer. I have seen church members raise their hands and draw attention to new people who would not recognize themselves as a first time attendant. So resistance to attention is futile.

During the Sunday service there is a section of announcements about upcoming events. I would use this time to gather information about church activities and programs. I attended as many as I could in order to get a genuine feel for the lives of the participants as well as the spiritual phenomena they experience. I will describe more in depth about the various church activities and programs in chapter four. Firstly, I will explain how I conducted participant observation, by highlighting a few church activities I engaged in. “Handprint” and the women’s retreat were among two of the most interesting activities in which I participated.

Handprint is a women’s program that takes place once a month. Many of the ladies of the church get together for worship and healing. They discuss sickness, personal issues and relate everything back to a Biblical context and in so doing they also provide for themselves an answer or remedy to their problems through the Word of God (The

Bible). I participated in “laying hands” on those who were troubled. In this participants would place their hands on or in the direction of the person(s) who have some sort of ailment or are in need of guidance and good wishes and send their energy and prayers to that person. Many of the women who participate in Handprint are also very active in the church. These women are very spiritual and are highly committed to their faith and one another.

At the women’s retreat I was able to spend a weekend living with the women of the First Assembly. Women from other First Assembly Churches in the area were invited as well. As a participant observer I experienced a whole room of women speaking in tongues. I also engaged in a survey with the purpose of “discovering” my spiritual gifts, which everyone shared at the end of the workshop. Participation in church activities made me more readily accepted into the community.

As I have illustrated above, there are limitless ways to conduct participant observation. I have sung worship songs on Sunday service, I participated in a survey during the women’s retreat, which revealed our individual spiritual gifts, I have participated in group quizzes given at the beginning of Wednesday bible study. Even something as simple as helping the pastor move is considered participant observation. Just because it is not necessarily spiritual does not mean that it is not relevant in research. Many people from the church came out and helped Pastor Rucci move.

## 5.2: Interviews and Conversations with faith practitioners

In order to address my main research questions which are: 1) What are the rituals practiced by members of the First Assembly of God Church in Fairbanks? 2) Is there a connection between the planting of Pentecostal Christianity (PC) in Fairbanks, and the nature of PC rituals? 3) How do individuals experience speaking in tongues? Does a form of spiritual possession/embodiment occur? To answer these questions I carried out a series of formal and informal interviews.

Interviews are split into formal and informal. Formal interviews are usually recorded in some fashion; these interviews are also more likely to be scripted. Formal interviews will take place at a certain time and place whereas informal interviews are not recorded and can be as simple as casual conversation the researcher engages in with an informant or participant. Both techniques are necessary and have a purpose within socio-cultural research. It all depends on the researcher and the informant as to which methods to use and when to use them. I did not use formal interviews until I felt that it was appropriate.

I started my fieldwork with participant observation and informal interviews. Using this order helped me as a researcher develop better questions while allowing the interviewees get a better idea of who I was and why I was there and become more comfortable with me. Extensive interviews allowed me to ask specific questions, which enabled me to ask for clarification or deeper answers if needed and I was able to observe emotional responses to my questions.



I conducted three formal interviews and several more informal. The three formal interviews were conducted with Pastor Rob Rucci, the current Church pastor (acting as both worship pastor and senior pastor), Kathi Kuhns an active missionary with the Church, and June Roland a Church secretary. The interviews last from 20 minutes to an hour in length and were followed up with several informal conversations.

Many of the members worried about being recorded and about the questions that I would ask. I assured them I was not out to challenge their religious beliefs or way of life; I only wanted to better understand it. I used a series of questions, which I would mold to each interviewee depending on the participants association with the church. I prepared specific questions and placed them into categories. I then identified the individual as a part of the staff and then asked questions to the individual who best fit the following categories:

- 1) General Questions (demographics)
- 2) Church Adherents/Members
- 3) Church Pastor(s) and Staff
- 4) Non-adherents

I asked everyone the general questions. These questions were about basic background demographic information. Once I felt comfortable enough to conduct formal interviews, I had already gleaned many of the answers to these questions from the majority of the interviewees. For Church members as well as pastors and staff I asked how the individual came into their faith and why they chose the First Assembly of God Church in Fairbanks. I later asked each if they would share a moment in their lives when their faith was reaffirmed, these accounts are often referred to as “testimonies”, among

Christians. For Pastor(s) and staff I asked about the organization of the church and what the individual's specific job entailed.

Before conducting each interview I made sure that both parties were comfortable and that I had a firm idea regarding the individual I was interviewing. I find this to be a great approach because the researcher can better guide the conversation, knowing what questions to ask and more importantly what not to ask. Religion can easily become a touchy subject, so knowing who the interviewee is helps alleviate any possible risks. As I progressed through each interview I did have a list of questions that, as I stated previously, I molded to the individual. I would add new questions as the interview progressed and tried as much as possible to keep my questions within the general flow of the conversation.

I spoke with a handful of people who were not church members. I wanted to know what outsiders thought about Pentecostalism and the manner of their worship (rituals). One woman I talked to was firmly against religion as a whole for personal reasons having to do with homosexuality. Another of my informants expressed the desire for community, and wanted to start going to church but not for spiritual reasons. The last informant actually attended a service with me; he called it the "rock and roll church," he actually returned for a few Sundays and generally enjoyed services. I am not going to focus on my interactions with the non-adherents though I did find it worth mentioning briefly.

Naturally, people in general are busy making it difficult to schedule interviews. I found adults whose children were grown and out of the house to be the most accommodating. Parents with young children were the most difficult to interview

formally. Thus, I conducted several informal interviews. Any time there was a church function, or before and after services and bible studies I would talk with several people of various ages and backgrounds. I tried to get a good sampling of the congregation. It is important for researchers not to search for a single opinion or experience in their research. I think it is good to attain several views and experiences in order to create a more accurate picture to represent a diverse group of individuals. I was fortunate that several of the events I attended were round table events where people would share their thoughts with those at their table and then with the entire group. This allowed me to grasp a good sampling of beliefs and opinions about various topics both inside and outside of religion (politics often became intermingled within religious discussion).

I learned early on how important it is to keep detailed field notes. It is important not only to jog the memory of the researcher but also to form questions and theories as time goes on. Though taking notes may seem like an obvious tool in conducting research it is one of the simplest to forget. After each event or service attended it was important to type up my notes and add more detail and thought recounting my experience. Already in 1909 Marcel Mauss established the importance of a 'fieldwork diary,' which is basically a way to catalog research so that nothing is missed in the write up of the data (Mauss 2007: 13).

This is why participant observation and interviews are so important. These methods allow the researcher to go and do what participants do as well as accompany believers while they experience spiritual phenomena. In using these methods, social scientists can learn more about people than from perhaps from statistical research. My

research is empirical; it is based on months of fieldwork and close contact with participants of the First Assembly of God Church. An open interview strategy led to new topics I had not previously considered as important, such as the role of church “planting.” Participant observation provided clarity as to the forms of glossolalia as a prayer language and as a message from God. These methods have led me to new theories and ideas such as spiritual embodiment and possession as a conduit. Within my field research it has been expressed that participants can individually communicate with God through a embodiment of the Holy Spirit, as a conduit to which the individual can understand God’s will.

## Chapter 6: Rituals and Ritualized Social Programs in the Assembly

“After all, religion is not merely a matter of assenting to a set of beliefs. Pentecostal religion is something that involves the entire body” (Donald E. Miller 2009: 276).

When the term ritual is brought up people tend automatically to think of baptism or communion, however there are several other social practices that also contain ritual elements. In order to understand ritual life one must first understand what it is that people do, their social practices. In this context many social practices involve ritual aspects, though this is not to say that all social practices do.

In my research as well as that of others, ritual involves more than physical action but words as well (Tambiah 1968; Shoaps 2002). When I say “words”, I am also referring to any utterances a participant makes that influence the ritual or spiritual state of the individual. These utterances may not be understandable or part of any language. An example is speaking in tongues, which is sometimes presented as a message from God. This message can be understood through another believer with the gift of discernment.

In this chapter I will examine the social practices as embedded with ritual at the First Assembly of God Church. Ritual aspects can be seen throughout the social activities of the Church members, and the fluidity with which religious specialists move from church to church suggests that ritual life may not be central to one individual religious leader but is rather self-sufficient. Later, I shall afford clarity on specific ritual elements

such as glossolalia, physical/symbolic, worship and spiritual possession/embodiment in relation to other case studies. I will show how PC Christianity often melds with existing communities adapting and coalescing with beliefs and practices already present forming a syncretic religion.

Through my participant observation at the First Assembly, I can see and understand ritual in a broader context through social programs. Focusing on liturgical aspects alone in a religious organization does not provide a holistic approach, which I find to be of the utmost importance. In this chapter I will first describe my experiences throughout the various social programs I attended at the First Assembly.

The First Assembly of God Church in Fairbanks, Alaska, has numerous rituals and social programs. Wednesday night there was both an adult bible study and an assortment of youth programs. On Tuesday the women's Bible study took place for one seven-week seminar series. There are several Children's clubs like the Royal Rangers and Impact girls, which teach Christian morality and culture. Then there are the adult retreats where the sexes split up and go on camping trips to discover and reconnect with God and their religious community. Handprint is a time where women refer to biblical text in order to give clarity and guidance to present circumstances. The quilting circle involves the gifting of blessed blankets to the outer native villages in Alaska. And lastly, I will discuss Sunday services including baptism and communion.

### 6.1: Wednesday Night Bible Study

When I first began my field research I started by attending the First Assembly Wednesday night adult Bible study. On Wednesday, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 at 7pm I began my fieldwork at the First Assembly Church. I was fortunate that I had only missed one class, as the series had just begun. I introduced myself to the acting Pastor as well as his wife and told them a little bit about my research. We then walked to the fellowship hall, which was somewhat like a mess hall with a kitchen at the very front of the room. Several tables and chairs filled the back of the room, with several more folded and resting against the walls. A large curtain separated the fellowship hall from the kitchen. In part, the curtain provided the illusion of privacy for the Bible study groups. During the same time period there were youth groups and daycare programs that used the kitchen.

The theme/message for each Bible study changed for each class. People would filter in as the class continued on. There was always coffee and some sort of snack located against the back wall. Usually the class held between five to fifteen participants. Dean, a church member highly active within the church community also ran the Wednesday adult Bible study. He would begin by handing out papers, which would indicate the topic of the night and correspond with the video segment about to be shown. The documents also included geographical pictures so that participants understood where the various Biblical events discussed actually took place.

To start the Bible study off Dean would open with a collection of testimonies. A testimony is in its basic form a testament to God's power, proof that God has done something in a person's life. After sharing testimonies, Deal then switches to those who

need prayer. These accounts usually ranged from family or friends with cancer or some sort of illness to troubled persons or simply well wishes on a birthday. The idea here is to send prayer and positive spiritual energy toward a person so that God will work on that person. One young lady in the group had a stroke several years ago that put her into a coma from which she “miraculously” recovered. The right side of her body has been damaged and the possibility of other health problems is high. Participants prayed for her at the beginning of every Bible study on Wednesday. Dean would write down the names of people and their ailments and then at the end he would say a prayer and mention each person on the list and ask God to bless them. Everyone else would slightly bow their heads mostly silently although there were some people who would slip into speaking in tongues. At the end everyone said Amen and then the session continued on.

After the beginning prayer the class continued with a quiz. On my first night I was a little nervous, I did not remember much of the Bible from my own childhood. The quizzes were very light hearted and the entire group took them together. I felt comforted when both Marybeth and Deana shared the same look of confusion when Dean would ask a question. As the course went on, Dean would jokingly pick on me to answer questions to which he knew I would not know the answer. The quizzes were short and came straight from the Bible. Once the group finished the quiz, Dean would play the session video for the day. The videos lasted from twenty to forty minutes. At the end of the film, some people would ask questions or make comments regarding the film. Dean would then refer back to the handouts and the class would go through and discuss the material.



On the back of the second handout, there was a ‘think about it’ section where Dean would place a theme from that day and ask questions which would relate the theme to everyday life. For example, in the first session that I attended, the River Jordan was considered a barrier to Israelites who were seeking the Promised Land. In this Biblical tale the Israelites were given orders from God to carry the Ark of the Covenant across the Jordan River. As they stepped into the river water it immediately stopped running and they were able to cross on dry ground. In the ‘think about it’ section Dean asks

“What barriers do you think stand between Christians today and the work God wants us to accomplish? To what extent do we commit ourselves to God and step out in faith to do what he has called us to do?” (Field notes: Dean, 2012).

In the Bible studies in which I have participated I have noticed that there is always a relation from Biblical to the everyday life of the practitioner.

The Bible study lasted until about 8:30-9pm. During one Bible study I remember Dean talking about baptism with full immersion. At the time I had little idea of how Pentecostals at the First Assembly conducted their baptisms. Dean said that baptism is a full immersion of the body in water. The water provides a sort of conduit in which the Holy Spirit then enters the participant and the believer is reborn. This is when I first became interested in the notion of possible spirit possession/embodiment. The Holy Spirit is said to reside in the believer. I will expand more on Baptism in the Sunday service section, and highlight other notes of spiritual possession/embodiment throughout this chapter.

At the same time as the adult Bible study the youth or the church were also learning. At the time Rob Rucci was acting as both the worship pastor and the senior pastor. Pastor Rob would give music lessons to the children and young adults on Wednesday nights as well, preparing these individuals for Sunday service where they would play along side him on the platform in front of the congregation. The youth in the Fairbanks First Assembly of God Church are presented with several different programs to hone their spirit and body.

#### 6.2: Tuesday Night Bible Study (Women's Bible Study)

The Women's Bible study began at the end of February on the 21<sup>st</sup>. At 6:30 pm on Tuesday nights the women of the First Assembly would gather in the Fellowship hall for a seven-week series. This Bible study had a very different feel than the Adult Bible study on Wednesday nights. The women's Bible study was more intense and delved deeper into the spirituality of the individual. While the Wednesday night service was more of a general history and understanding of Pentecostal religious belief, the women's bible study was focused on the individual's connection with God and the spiritual realm. It was a very different dynamic and significantly more in-depth, spiritually, than the Wednesday study which was kept light with jokes.

Upon arrival each participant received a workbook and a journal/diary. The workbook is titled *Discerning the voice of God: How to Recognize When God Speaks*, authored by Priscilla Shirer. Shirer is a published author in Christian spiritual literature. She has a Master's degree in Biblical Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary School

and participates as well as leads numerous women's ministries in various denominations (<http://www.goingbeyond.com/biography>). Along with being a well-known author in the PC Christian community Shirer also produced ten video series on various Biblical agendas. As a mother of three and a rather enthusiastic speaker Shirer seemed to easily capture the minds of those within the women's bible study I attended.

The goal of this Bible study was to better understand God as he works within the lives of believers. The study also offers advice on how to open the mind in order to detect these messages. Each day the individual has to complete a section in the course book. The group would then meet on Tuesday to discuss what had been learned from the homework.

The structure of the women's bible study was very similar to that of Wednesday night study. The ladies would congregate in the fellowship hall, snack and chat until the host, Deana Browning, came to the front and quieted the group. We sat in small groups at round tables; people would shift between tables often so I never knew who would be at the table with me.

In the initial meeting Deana spoke about her journey emphasizing the importance to stay true to oneself and to God. Following this introduction was a brief worship. A young woman, who is rather talented with the guitar as well as singing, led the group. After about three or four songs the group would once again resume their seats. Deana would ask for testimonies and then begin a short prayer.

Deana outlined the goals of the series and then played the video, which accompanied the session for the day. The clips are usually between twenty to thirty-five

minutes in length. After the film, participants would collectively share thoughts and personal experiences, which were relevant to the topic. After the first session homework was given, which participants would talk about and share before the video. Discussing the bookwork was a warm up to get the participants thinking before the video, which would reinforce the spirituality of each individual and the group as a whole.

During one session one of the women shared a truly unfortunate experience she had when she did not listen to what God had told her. She was at the doctor's office getting a physical when she heard God's voice telling her she was to give witness to the doctor. She said in response no, he is my doctor. She did not want to seem like a religious fanatic, so she kept it to herself. She learned about a day or so later that the same doctor was killed in a car crash. She still carries the guilt of not bearing witness to this individual when she feels that she was clearly told to do so. This personal story brought out the idea that God is omnipresent and it is not in the interest of the believer to doubt the reasons of their Lord and savior. Each session would end with discussion followed by a brief prayer. At the end of the prayer, women would go collect their children from the Church daycare. Others would mingle and talk more deeply with friends.

The last session was very different. The video series was only meant to be a six-week series. The seventh meeting was more of a wrap up. Everyone brought a dish to pass, turning the last session into sort of like a potluck. Rather than a smattering of small tables dispersed around the back of the room, we pulled several tables together creating one larger table. All of the women held hands in prayer this night, in order to give thanks for the food that was about to be consumed. After this the participants shared stories, and

talked about the Women's Bible study series. I had the pleasure of sitting next to one of the oldest members of the church, at 93. She told me that she loves young people and that they are the future. She then held my hand and slipped into her prayer language to bless me. Others intermittently spoke in tongues throughout the session. Most did so at the end of the meeting as the women closed in prayer, once again taking one another's hands.

At this time I would like to go more in depth about the subject matter of the Women's Bible study. I would like to primarily focus on the workbook, *Discerning the voice of God*. There are four main sections: "The Anticipation of God's Voice", "The Spirit of God's Voice", "The Nature of God's Voice", and "The Purpose of God's Voice" (Shirer 2006). In the section "Anticipation of God's Voice", it is illustrated that it is through the Holy Spirit that individuals are able to hear God's voice. Yet it cannot be heard if the believer is not confident in his/her convictions. One must be open and ready to listen according to Shirer.

Quite possibly the most relevant section to my research in spiritual embodiment and possession is the chapter titled The Spirit of God's Voice. This chapter was wrapped up within two Bible studies. Shirer illustrates how the body, soul, and Spirit are different (refer to Figure 6.1 below).



Figure 6.1: Body, *Spirit* and Soul. This figure is a representation of the components within the believer. The Body is the physical aspect of the believer, the Soul is the mind and the Spirit is represents the Holy Spirit, a way for the individual to communicate with God.

The Body references the physical being. The soul is the human conscience that, according to Shirer, is the last piece of a person that remains unclean. The soul is the mind, reason, will and emotion. In the end it is said that Jesus Christ will cleanse the conscience of the individual. The Spirit portion of the individual makes up the core of the believer. This is where the Holy Spirit resides once an individual becomes baptized, becoming a true believer. The Holy Spirit provides a means to communicate with God, he is the voice of God and the primary conduit to God. Shirer gives an anecdote for the influence that the Holy Spirit has on the individual.

“When I was pregnant with my first son, I began a love affair with chocolate. I never had a taste for it until my eighth month. Something happened that changed my taste buds; I had never desired chocolate. Now

I can't get enough! When the new life of the Holy Spirit takes up residence in you, He begins to change your taste buds" (Shirer 2006: 41).

In this statement Shirer demonstrates that there are subtle changes that happen after baptism, when the Holy Spirit is allowed into the believer wholly. At this point in time the participant is considered "filled with the Spirit," as the Holy Spirit fills the core of their being. Shirer states that when a person is baptized in the Holy Spirit he/she is not changed but exchanged, becoming a new person. Shirer provides accounts of other Pentecostal members such as Hannah Whitall Smith who states:

"He will take possession of our will and work it for us...His suggestions will come to us...as desires springing up within. They will originate in our will; we shall feel as though we wanted to do so and so, not as though we must" (Shirer 2006: 43).

In this statement it is illustrated again that the Holy Spirit is invited into the individual possessing a small portion of the believers will. In speaking to participants at the First Assembly regarding this possession, Rob Rucci explained that the Holy Spirit can suggest, urge and whisper to a person but cannot otherwise control a person. The individual's will supersedes the Holy Spirit. This could be called spiritual embodiment rather than possession because though there is still a supernatural force present, it is not in control. However, Shirer explains her experience in some ways to be akin to obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) in which case she feels so compelled by the Holy Spirit that she cannot resist. As I will show in cases of spiritual embodiment the Holy Spirit does

not control the individual. In some cases there does seem to be form of spiritual possession present, which will be addressed later.

The Holy Spirit is said to shape the individual to become more like Christ. To not follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit as a believer is a sin. In this section, Shirer makes it quite clear that the Holy Spirit makes changes, permeating the individual; “I give you [God] my body, will and emotions,” through the Holy Spirit (God). The Holy Spirit works with the conscious/soul to make better decisions and steer the body/physical in the right direction.

Priscilla Shirer demonstrates throughout the series that the individual needs to be open and ready to listen to the Holy Spirit, as well as follow through with whatever the Holy Spirit guides them to do. To be certain it is the will of the Holy Spirit rather than the individual conscious, the believer is encouraged to turn to the Bible to confirm that the Holy Spirit is indeed behind the spiritual instruction. Shirer states that there are five ways to hear God. 1) Message of the spirit, 2) Mode of prayer, 3) Model of Scripture, 4) Ministry of Eli, 5) Mercy of confirmation (Shirer 2006: 27). When a message from God is given the believer must confirm the message through several of these methods in order to make sure the message is not from the individual self or from the enemy but from God.

The last two chapters, “The Nature of God’s Voice” and “The Purpose of God’s Voice” demonstrate God’s character and his intentions. At several sessions women would hug me and say, “God loves you.” These women are reaffirming what they know as true, God’s character through voice and Word. Shirer states that God will lead the believer to what he/she cannot otherwise see. Similar to watching one squirrel run up into



a tree where suddenly 10 other squirrels appear, Shirer provides this metaphor in order to explain that participants will not always see God's plan but it is there nonetheless. Shirer also gives several examples for God's methods to equip believers. Moses may not have survived his time in the desert alone, but it is said that God equipped him with dedication, direction and a destination (Shirer 2006:83). At the end of the last section everyone is reminded that if God speaks to you (through the Holy Spirit), you must first confirm the message through scripture then follow through with the direction. Women seem to exhibit beliefs and practices akin to Shirer's prospective on religious interpretation, which I believe is because they relate to her as a woman and as a mother. Many women throughout the sessions would often nod and laugh when Shirer would provide anecdotes of parenting. Needless to say, I found this study to be one of the most informational and spiritually intense forums within my field research.

### 6.3: Retreats

Retreats usually come about once a year. The women usually stay close by whereas the men often travel to their retreat site. Both retreats cost money. Many Church members who are more economically well off will sponsor others in the Church who would like to go on these retreats but cannot afford to do so. I found this to be very important, especially in what is seen as an isolated area like Fairbanks, Alaska. I was also offered this sponsorship; it creates a level of trust and community between church members.

Retreats offer a time where believers can join together in fellowship and worship in a safe spiritually charged atmosphere. While Sunday service and Bible studies also provide a version of this, a retreat is longer. The retreats usually last a weekend, beginning on a Friday afternoon extending to Sunday night. In this time there are activities, speakers, and group sessions, which were geared to propagate spiritual phenomena.

*6.3.1: Men's Retreat.* Though I did not attend the Men's Retreat, I feel that it is important to mention that one does take place. Several First Assemblies Churches plan a large men's retreat, and all the men traveled down to Wasilla, for a main PC center, this year's retreat. There was a hunting trip and for prizes, this year 25 men received a new bow and arrow set. I found it interesting that the men's retreat consisted of fellowship and hunting.

*6.3.2: Women's Retreat.* The men are not the only ones who go on trips in this community. The adults also go on retreats, usually once a year. The retreat was scheduled to take place from March 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup>, as a sleep over. I attended the retreat, which stays within town limits, yet on the outskirts of Fairbanks, in case mothers need to go home and tend to their children, or at least that was what several women told me. Participants met at Camp LiWa, which is a Bible Camp. When I got to the main cabin of the camp a few of the women saved me a spot in their room within the main cabin. This was lucky for me because the other cabins were quite far away. After stashing my things

in the room, I came back to the main foyer where some of the women were loitering. One of the women handed me a bag containing a nametag, highlighter, journal that had my initial on it, and a stone with a Biblical verse etched into it. The highlighter was for highlighting passages in one's personal Bible. While I waited I met several other women as they were filtering in. It was nice seeing new faces, as typically the same group of women attended the Tuesday and Wednesday studies. The retreat provided a good opportunity to meet other church members.

The guest speaker this year was JoAnne Meckstroth, who had been involved in ministry for the last 25 years. JoAnne made sure to talk with each person at the retreat. During one of the seminars she lectured about how important spiritual gifts are. These divine gifts exist in all believers and it is important to know one's own gifts. After the first session participants were directed to the back of the room, on a table there was a box of cloth wraps/shawls. Jamie and Deana, two of the organizers for the event provided prayer cloths for everyone. In doing so one would just pull the cloth over their head and have a place to worship God, anywhere at any time. Though it is emphasized that attending church and worshipping with fellow members is important, it is also important to worship on an individual level as well. Sometimes individuals cannot always make it to the larger group fellowships, so the prayer shawl was to be used in those situations as well.

In order to do this she provided us all with a booklet called the *Wagner-Modified Houts Questionnaire*, which was designed by the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth. The idea was to measure the participant's level of

agreement with certain statements. For example, “I have applied spiritual truth effectively to situations in my own life,” after this the participant marks either 3) Much, 2) Some 1) Little, or 0) Not at all in agreement with the aforementioned statement. One hundred and twenty-five questions later, at the end of the booklet, there is a spreadsheet in which you put the various values (number you gave each question) into selected slots. There were Rows of A through Y, which stood for different spiritual gifts a person could possess. After filling in the spreadsheet we were told to total each row. The idea behind this is that whichever row the participant has the highest number in is what they are gifted in. For example I had a high of thirteen in two rows, Mercy and Hospitality, thus those would be my spiritual gifts whereas I had zero for Tongues, Interpretation and Exorcism.

The young woman next to me, Brittany, had the opposite result and her gifts were Tongues and Discerning of Spirits. Some participants were up through the night completing the booklet and discussing the results. Several people had gone home, some went to bed. About a third of the group stayed awake chatting about spiritual experiences, faith and gifting in the spirit. The spiritual gifts listed in the booklet are as follows: prophecy, pastor, teaching, wisdom, knowledge, exhortation, discerning of spirits, giving, helps, mercy, missionary, evangelist, hospitality, faith, leadership, administration, miracles, healing, tongues, interpretation, voluntary poverty, celibacy, intercession, and service.

The next day, Saturday the 24<sup>th</sup>, there were two different workshops to choose from, Zumba or a women’s health talk. After these workshops the women reunited in the main cabin for the next session. The session that day began with song and worship, and

then JoAnne spoke. At one point JoAnne told us to get into our prayer voices. Everyone in the room began to do so. I watched as women raised their hands in worship. Some were praying loudly while others scarcely made a sound. After this, Brittany moved forward, as she had been crying. She told JoAnne that she had a message and asked if she could tell the group. She also told everyone that she did not like getting up in front of everyone but the message was from God given to her through the Holy Spirit and that was important. She got up and faced the group then placed one hand in the air and slipped into her prayer voice. As she spoke in tongues she uttered “He-no-sheesh” over and over for a few minutes.

Brittany gave the message to the room, once the message was given JoAnne stepped up and asked for a participant who had the gift of discernment to come forward and translate the message. No one stepped forward. After a minute or so JoAnne told the group that they could translate the message and that the Holy Spirit would provide the words, the individual simply needed to speak them. Participants around the room said what came to their minds. About four to five people gave pieces to the message. The utterances that Brittany gave meant that God was there and he loved us all and encouraged us to seek him. This was a very intense time. People were filled with the spirit, there was a sort of energy in the room accompanied by an emotional rollercoaster as people cried and prayed, hugged and smiled at the knowledge that God’s presence was there.

As the retreat came to an end, JoAnne prayed over Brittany and told everyone that if they wanted to stay she would do the same for each person. As she prayed over

Brittany everyone in the room walked over and surrounded them. The people closest to them put their hands on the pair, the next circle of people then put their hands upon the shoulders of those people and so on. In that circle, everyone was connected through touch; it is no surprise that physical intimacy comes with spiritual phenomena and ritual.

It is worth mentioning that I witnessed people speaking in tongues during services and other church events. However, the first time I had ever heard ‘speaking in tongues’ referred to as a ‘personal prayer language’ was at the women’s retreat. Pastor Rob Rucci later told me that a prayer language, or speaking in tongues, is one’s own expression for a spiritual experience that common human language cannot measure. Participants are communicating phenomena that words cannot express. During several sessions, the entire room would engage in their private prayer languages. Now, this is one reason for speaking in tongues. Another is as a message from God through the Holy Spirit, which resides within the participant. In my time at the women’s retreat I observed women using their prayer voices and communicating with God. I also witnessed what was explained to me as a response from God through Brittany’s prayer language.

#### 6.4: Handprint

Handprint takes place on the second Friday of every month at seven o’clock in the evening till late in the night. I have only been to a few. The women of the church, of any age, are welcomed into the main worship hall where Sunday service takes place. Chairs were pulled into a circle, when there are only a few people it is more of a U shape. The handprints that I attended were small groups of between six to ten women. As I talked

with some of the participants, they informed me that usually the groups are much larger and that the session can go quite late into the night and become an intense spiritual event.

As I sat down, a woman stepped up and welcomed everyone to Handprint and thanked us for coming. We chatted awhile, awaiting any stragglers and giving time for people to get settled in. When it became clear that no one else was coming, Handprint began. During this time individuals gave brief introductions. Many of the women took turns leading the discussion, which everyone participated in. The first topic was “fear.” One woman claimed that she had a fear of not having a “thing”, something that she was good at and loved doing, an occupation. Throughout the night we conversed about the dangers of letting fear in. Others assured the woman that God has a plan and it will be revealed; she just needed to pray and listen for the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Another part of Handprint is healing. As the end of the session drew near an older member expressed her need for healing and prayer. She is currently going through chemotherapy and was not feeling well physically so she turned to spiritual healing as the most powerful method of healing that one could invoke. One of the women smeared some kind of oil on her forehead; it may have been Holy Water. I did not ask at such an emotionally charged time. Everyone leaned forward and placed their hands out in her direction. Most of the women actually got up and stood in a circle around the older woman as she sat in her seat. The women who had remained in their seats with their hands outstretched sending their prayer and spiritual energy toward the elderly woman soon took a cue from the others and moved closer. Soon everyone was physically touching the woman and tears began to streak her face.

As I stood crammed against the other women there was a sense of companionship. As I touched her shoulder and hoped that she would feel better others engaged in their prayer languages. The participants stood there for quite some time, some of the women came to sit or kneel at the older woman's feet so that they could hold her hand. Once the group broke apart many still lingered close to the elder woman and chatted quietly with her. She thanked everyone and told us all that she felt much better. The experience was certainly emotionally charged as well as spiritually driven. Through the positive energy, whispering prayer voices (speaking in tongues) and physical touch of the surrounding women, the elderly woman was given a reprieve from her pain which I am sure goes beyond physical when dealing with an ailment like cancer.

As participants ended in prayer they would sometimes hold hands. These rituals often require some sort of physical contact and intimacy among individuals. The group broke for the night and I helped move the chairs back into place. The women said that they had enjoyed my company and hoped to see me at the next handprint. The session ended around ten o'clock that night, though several women stayed longer to talk amongst one another. Though everyone is encouraged to share life goals and personal problems with the group, it is the one on one fellowship that is also highly taken advantage of. In several of the activities in which I have participated I have noticed women seeking small group (one or two persons) fellowship directly after a large group ritual such as Bible study or Sunday service. Within the First Assembly many will share broad experiences or specific stories relevant to the topic but will share their current, deeper, ailments with one or two other members of the group. I have found that there are several different types of



worship and fellowship depending on the size of the group and the relationships among the participants in those groups.

### 6.5: Quilting Circle

Quilting Circle takes place Monday nights at 6:30pm as an outreach ministry. Though I never attended the women's quilting circle I did talk to those who were a part of it. The women in the quilting circle were at various skill levels, and produced a multitude of quilts from scrap cloth. At certain points in the year they would gather all of the quilts they have worked on and give the blankets to local village people. On May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012 (Mother's Day), Mother's Day Sunday service featured the quilts being displayed on the little railing, which encompasses the center stage on both sides. Throughout the morning, service participants were encouraged to pray over the quilts before they were to be sent out. People would bless the blankets in several ways. Some would approach the quilts and silently touch them or reach their hands toward them. Others would additionally use their words, some of the participants would whisper in their prayer languages. It is thought that in blessing the blankets, the individuals who receive the blankets will be blessed. This illustrates the belief in transference of spiritual energy from an object to an individual.

## 6.6: Sunday Service

Sunday services were quite interesting for they often varied the lineup of events. In this simple switch of daily activities the participants were more attentive in the service. Throughout my field research I characterized the services in two ways, usual Sunday services and special Sunday services. By usual I account for the everyday services which consisted of the same ritual behaviors. Special services include, communion (taking of the Eucharist), Palm Sunday (holidays) and baptisms. Other than the Wednesday night bible study I was primarily involved with the women of the Church so Sunday services provided me the opportunity to hear the men of the First Assembly.

*6.6.1: Usual Service.* Sunday service begins at 10:30am. The first time I attended service; I was surprised that the majority of people were not in the worship hall. Many people were congregating in the foyer of the main entrance. There is also a little café adjacent to the worship hall. People would talk and catch up on the week's events before heading toward their seats. Though some participants did switch seats between services, most people had a preferential seating area. I sat with the Rucci's and the Browning's until the families moved to plant a Church in South Carolina, which I will talk more about later. If ever I sat alone another member would always come and sit next to me, which I thought was interesting. As a newcomer, it certainly helps become integrated and feel welcomed within the church when other church participants acknowledge and encourage the individual. Before I describe more regarding the ritual of Sunday service, I

think it is important to address why people have chosen the First Assembly of God Church.

In one of my interviews June Roland (Church Secretary) told me that she felt unwelcomed at the Catholic Church, which she attended when she was younger. She spoke of feeling judged and out of place. When she was about to get married she asked the pastor at the First Assembly if he would conduct the ceremony even though she was not a member. June states that at this point she was not Christian and she was living with her boyfriend, which was frowned upon. She expected him to say no, and he said yes, “at the drop of a hat” (Roland Interview). After that, she and her husband began looking at churches to attend, as she wanted more of a spiritual connection with God. The following is an excerpt from June’s interview:

“So we said well there is nothing there so we can’t go there [Roman Catholic Church] so we said well why don’t we go where we got married. And we thought ‘oh you think we can?’ So we were just talking and then we showed up and there was such a peace and such a beautiful atmosphere, and of course it was God. And so we were, we were still doing our thing. I was still dressing like not very nice. But nobody condemned us. Which was amazing because if they had we would have been out the door. So we just kept going and going to church and then finally little things just began to drop off, that we knew we couldn’t do anymore. And it was just like we woke up one day and we go ‘oh we can’t do this...oh okay.’ Ya know so there was no preaching, there was no

condemning there was just pure God, pure grace and that, that endeared us to him even more” (Field notes: Roland Interview 2012).

I have talked with numerous participants who seem to have similar stories. Many believers who attend this church do so because they are seeking a deeper relationship with God as well as stronger connection with other followers within the community.

Sunday service provides a sense of community as people file into their seats surrounded by others who share common beliefs and genuinely care for each other. It was interesting to watch; there appeared to be no outcasts. It was exceedingly rare to see anyone sitting alone, other than the ladies who faced the room and signed for those that were hearing impaired.

The Worship Hall is fairly large with a stage in front, which was occupied by several musicians. The First Assembly encourages people of all ages to play an instrument or sing. Pastor Rucci often gave lessons on Wednesday night to any who wanted to learn. Behind the piano was a drum setup surrounded by translucent plastic panels creating a little room used as a buffer, for sound control. Next to the drums were the various guitar players, along the side there were three to four backup singers and at center stage Pastor Rucci lead worship. The group sang anywhere between four and six songs depending on the day’s events. When the singing stopped, Pastor Rob would say a prayer, the musicians continued to play, and then he told the group to turn and greet one another. This greeting is similar to a Catholic “peace be with you” handshake. I would turn to talk to those I sat next to, but rather than a simple handshake, there would be a hug. Even those I did not know would approach and hug me conversing shortly then

move on to another individuals and do the same. After attending several church activities I was approached by more people as I became more involved with the church community.

Some days, the church would have prayer groups. On these days, people could pray independently or with others. The prayer groups usually consisted of two people; a participant could go up to them and tell them about their troubles or simply just pray in the presence of others. The prayer group members would often speak in tongues and physically touch or hold hands with the person they were praying with. Several times people would cry. There were about four or five prayer groups depending on the day. One day a woman was particularly distressed and other members came out of the congregation to add to the prayer group surrounding the woman. This usually occurred as Pastor Rob was ending the morning worship. He would continue singing. This created a sort of comfort; individuals could go up to the front of the room to meet with the prayer group while others continued worshiping through song. They were not exposed in front of a silent room.

As people made their way back to their seats Dean went up to the podium on the stage and the musicians returned back to their seats among the congregation. Dean would often begin with a joke or something mildly entertaining. Then he continued on to give the morning announcements and upcoming events as well as delivering news such as baby births, engagements/marriages, and deaths. After this, he would give the microphone over to the pastor or speaker for the day. The First Assembly was in a transitional period while I attended. Though Pastor Rucci was the worship pastor, he also

took on the role as senior pastor while the church interviewed candidates. Reverend Bob Johnson would occasionally fill in, other times missionaries would deliver the message for the day. Most often it was Pastor Rob, until the first week in June when Mark Phillips took over as Senior Pastor of the First Assembly Church.

The First Assembly often switched the order of ritual activities, which is important to keep in mind. Pastor Rob liked to switch things to keep people paying attention and actively interested. The songs were not the same from service to service, and the greeting and tithing varied in the program though both were done to music. After a few weeks Pastor Rucci and Dean decided that a media element during service would be exciting. Sometime before the daily message from the pastor the group would watch a video, which usually had some sort of musical element. They were very uplifting and often engaged viewers; similar to a good rallying speech you may hear in a movie.

On one particular Sunday Pastor Rucci focused on the idea of “being asleep behind the wheel.” In his message he describes one of his drives back to college in which he fell asleep while driving. He stated that the Church was also in some ways falling asleep, following a pattern and forgetting the reason behind the ritual. This is where the idea of fans and followers came into the morning message. Rucci played a video that explained the importance of home fellowships. Rucci states that in his opinion people need to step forward and let Christ fill every aspect of their lives, letting God “take the wheel”, so to speak. The “fans” expect to do the minimum and receive the full gifts of God, but to receive spiritual gifts a believer must be a follower. I thought this was an interesting lecture, as throughout Rucci’s messages there is always an element that pulls

Biblical scripture into an individual's everyday life. In my opinion, this is a very effective method in keeping participants engaged and understanding a different or cryptic text.

Throughout all Sunday Services various participants would engage in glossolalia. Some people were quite loud, I could hear one young woman across the room quite clearly, and others spoke softly only audible to those in close proximity. During some services, people would get up and dance or stand in the opening between the stage and the first row of seats and sway with hands in the air. Music is played several times throughout services; I find that it created a great social lubricant. Music allows members to talk, or leave the room without eliciting attention; it also provides a segue in transition from one activity to the next during events.

*6.6.2: Special Sunday Services.* On April 1<sup>st</sup>, the usual morning worship began at 10:30am. The pastor briefly spoke about the upcoming events with an emphasis on Water Baptism. The morning greeting took place and I managed to find Brittany and her husband across the room. It is hard to meander across the room with so many people mingling; the entire room is filled with people, epitomizing "feeling like a sardine." Pastor Johnson presented a short message for the day. His messages were often longer and more scriptural with little humor. Pastor Johnson possesses a stereotypical 50's style of preaching. He is very dry; his presence is more forceful with a fire and brimstone tone. Pastor Rucci is younger, making use of anecdotes and metaphors and delivering a message in a softer tone. The two styles relate to their age and personal experience and appeal to different audiences. Pastor Johnson focused his morning message on the cross

as a symbol and how important that symbol was and what it meant and still means. The cross is a reminder, a symbol of a gift given to humanity by Jesus Christ who sacrificed his life for the sins of humanity. Pastor Johnson emphasized that the second coming of Christ was imminent and that believers must be ready for it.

April 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 was Palm Sunday and the church participants took communion on this day. This was the first communion that I witnessed at the First Assembly. Coming from a Catholic background it seemed odd to me, from what little I can remember of my own religious experience, the Church I had attended took communion every Sunday. Kathi Kuhns sat with me on that day, and I asked her questions about the ritual practices of the Church. She told me the church would not usually go this long between communions, however they were certainly not part of everyday service. She said that in the past the church took the Eucharist once a month.

When it was time to take communion the ushers were called up. There was a table in front of the stage area in the front of the room. On the table were two gold colored containers. As the ushers came to the front of the room Pastor Johnson took the lids off of the containers to show several rings. Each ring contained little plastic cups filled with wine (or more likely grape juice) and a little metal plate in the center with little wafer squares. Each usher would take a ring and move to a specific spot in the room or balcony to distribute the contents of the ring. I participated in this event, taking the small cup and wafer. Kathi showed me that the chairs had little holes in the wood underneath for the cup of wine. After everyone was served, the ushers returned to the front, reassembled the rings, and then returned to their seats. As they did so, Pastor Johnson gave a brief speech



and then instructed the audience to partake in the body and blood of Christ (the Eucharist). Pastor Rucci began playing soft music and as he did so people gradually filtered out of the worship hall.

On Sunday April 15<sup>th</sup>, Pastor Rucci gave water baptisms. After the morning music and message, the children from children's church filed in and sat on the floor in the front of the room facing the stage. Pastor Rucci had filled the baptismal bathtub, which was more of a large tank than a bathtub. Pastor Rucci stood in the tub to the right of the stage and told the congregation that every believer should be baptized through total submersion in water at an age where the participant is fully aware of the choice he or she is making. Participants would change into appropriate dress wear and then emerge from a backroom, which lead to a set of stairs into the water tank. The participants would briefly say why they were making this decision and then they would stand to the right of Pastor Rucci with their arms crossed hands on their shoulders or one hand plugging their nose, then Rucci would dunk them in and pulled them back out. They would emerge, as a new person, true followers and no longer fans, "born-again." Water baptism is a public affirmation.

It was not only adults who were baptized this day, several of the older children made the decision to do so as well. This is why all of the children were present, to watch and support their peers as they made the choice to become baptized. Service ended shortly after the baptisms and once again everyone filed out of the hall and into the church foyer to chat and congratulate those that were baptized. I myself found the idea of

water baptism at an older age appealing. Water baptism is a promise from the believer to God that they will follow and in return he will guide and provide spiritual gifts.

## Chapter 7: Discussion of Key Themes

Throughout my research I have discovered several themes. Here I will discuss social and political themes at the First Assembly. I will also argue more in depth regarding the use of verbal language versus the physicality of liturgy among PC Christians. Lastly I will reexamine the shamanism/possession debate and how my own research fits into this structure bringing shedding new light on a classic division of thought.

### 7.1: Socio-political Themes in the Assembly

There are several socio-political aspects to PC religion; first I would like to recognize the various participants, ‘players’ if you will. These are the people who make up the congregation and it is only fitting to identify the rolls they play. I will not include those of other Protestant faiths within this discussion, though it is worth noting that non-PC individuals do attend the First Assembly of God.

#### *Players*

Within Pentecostalism there are several key players. The church is made up of adherents, members, and missionaries. General adherents include new participants, visiting, and all others who have not yet become members. Throughout my fieldwork I noticed several newcomers who, after a period of several months, decided to become members of the Church. Membership is a big step though the individual can dissolve or

transfer it. In this (Pentecostal) community entering into membership is not a decision made idly; it is taken seriously.

Among these members are a particular group of individuals who travel to various countries in order to help build churches, schoolhouses, and provide general aid including education. While they are in these locations missionaries spread the Word of God and try to 'save' whole communities. Though missionaries do tend to go to regions such as Africa and India where the largest populations of non-Christians exist, it is key to recognize that missionization is global. For example Kathi Kuhns and a mission's team from the Church took their group to Uganda. Alaska is still considered in need of evangelism and I have heard of church members going to Native Alaskan villages providing aid and spreading the PC influence where they can. The ladies of the quilting circle for example have the congregation pray over the quilts are then taken out to the remote village communities. These people make up the congregation, the pastor is also a member of the congregation but he is also outside of it.

The pastor facilitates ritual activities and leads the congregation. He/she arranges the topics discussed, the 'message' given on Sunday service. The pastor is an individual who is considered to be most spiritually knowledgeable, a leader to follow. Having said this I have also seen other individuals link up, individuals will form groups with others whom they share similar ideology and consultation other than the pastor. Other church members teach Sunday school classes as well as bible studies.

This religious leader may not be necessary for ritual practice as previously stated in an early chapter he/she can act as a mediator between the individual(s) and divinity.

PC Christianity is set apart from other Christian denominations because the individual also has a direct line to God and does not need assistance from the pastor to commune with the deity. This makes the pastor less essential in the ritual life of the believer.

The role of pastor as a religious specialist is important however his/her roll has become very fluid. As Rucci has stated church planting is the Charismatic gift of apostle. These individuals are constantly moving to create new churches. Each year since 1965 The Assembly of God has published a list of AG churches opening and closing (see Appendix A). In the year 2012 the AG documented 391 new churches opening their doors to the United States public alone. The high mobility of pastors in PC Christianity gives the congregant autonomy providing the ability to form an individual relationship with their deity.

I would be remiss if I did not mention God the omnipresent deity as a player in PC Christianity. It is the belief of the Assembly of God that God is represented in three forms, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit together they make up the Holy Trinity. The congregant is to first and foremost accept Jesus Christ as the savior, the Holy Spirit as the voice/will of God and God as the father and creator. Together these make up the players of the First Assembly. Though I have described the participants as players I am not insinuating that they are engaged in a game.

### *Ritual embedded in Social Practice*

As I participated in church activities and being around these individuals constantly for the past six months, I have learned that their ritual life takes many forms. It

is difficult to find a clear line between what is ritual and what is social practice. Ritual is often embedded in social practice. However I will make the distinction that some events contain more ritualized elements than others. In my interview with June Roland she told me about a time when she was in the car with her son when her brakes gave out.

“The things I really want to stress is the relationship that I have, and He has promised to watch out for you and to watch, when you become His He will never leave you or forsake you and this one testimony is...well...my older son loved basketball, I loved basketball. So in the summer we would drive to this little basketball court and I had an older car and it was kind of like a little Camaro, it was kind of classic. And um we were driving to the place, to the playground and the radio was on and we were talking. And all of the sudden I heard this voice saying ‘slow down you don’t have any brakes’...it was so audible to me but it was not audible. It was just like ‘slow down you don’t have any brakes.’ And I looked at my son and said ‘what did you say’ and he said ‘nothing’ and I said huh. And we just kept going and all of the sudden I heard this ‘slow down you don’t have any brakes’ and I said ‘what did you say?’ And he said ‘nothing mom’ and I stepped on my brake and I had no brake!” (Field notes: Roland 2012).

Roland’s account was indeed a spiritual experience. This is an example of spiritual embodiment, rather than a spiritual possession. June said that the voice of the Holy Spirit had been so clear and loud in her mind that she thought someone else was speaking at first. She and others have expressed that in urgent situations the Holy Spirit within can be

as clear and loud in his/her mind as talking with someone allowed. The believer may experience times when he/she is led by a feeling or compulsion while other times the Holy Spirit communicates more forcefully like that in June's testimony. I have come to the realization that when a participant speaks of the Holy Spirit as their subconscious this is spiritual embodiment. The individual is in control yet is also embodied with the Spirit. I will provide another example of ritual (during the women's retreat) when I discuss the use of language as ritual.

In my opinion, ritual can be subject to adaptation and variation depending upon the group and the goal(s) of the group. Ritual in my opinion can be easily identified for example Sunday service; furthermore ritual is also embedded in daily social practices such as prayer before a meal. During Handprint, one of the women's activities, ladies would touch and pray over a participant who needed healing, this is a ritualistic act with symbolism and supernatural phenomena. After the 'laying of hands' the participant always shares how much better they feel. I will address this concept more later in this chapter.

### *Worship and Community*

Worship is considered one of the most important components within Pentecostal Christianity. In my own research, I noticed every person with whom I conversed said they came to the First Assembly for their worship (ritual). Seeing ritual in PC Christianity as different from other Christian churches. At Sunday service, the worship style varies yet consists of certain main components: musical worship, prayer and the message. The

whole service is seen as a time of worship and fellowship which believers are compelled to attend. I was told several times that going to Sunday service is part of a commitment to God and is part of a fellowship with other Christians, which is a Biblically emphasized practice. Though participants have busy lives, many find the time to attend Sunday as well as other social programs. Many members volunteer to teach classes or help in church activities.

The worship music is often more contemporary rather than straight out of the gospels. Musical worship provides a form of expression for the musician and for those who sing and dance to it. Music can also become a “trigger a sense of close presence” with the divine (Albrecht 1999: 226). This does not only appeal to a younger audience it also brings excitement to the elder members of the Church. Many Pentecostals convert from various denominations later in life. In doing so, these individuals are often seeking more intense spiritual worship. Pastor Rucci gave a message regarding the need for a revival for the church members who have fallen asleep, put to sleep by habitual services with less than lively worship. This is how most Pentecostal-Charismatic churches function, on an ever-changing service and a spiritually charged worship environment.

Worship can take place at home as well, as the First Assembly recently began home fellowships for small group worship and prayer. Another mode of worship can be individual, as the women of the church use their prayer shawls to create a private place of worship. Albrecht states that the Sea City Pentecostals saw their worship as a performance for God, stating, “God inhabits the praises of his people” (Albrecht 1999: 227). I have heard similar statements in my own research. Worship at the First Assembly



indeed seemed to be a performance of God, some women would dance or sway in the front with their hands up. Everyone participated in the worship in some way. It did not matter if one could carry a tune, worship was about community performing for God and illustrating their loyalty. Thus it is considered one of the most important elements in a believer's spiritual life.

### *Political*

The structure of the First Assembly is that of any political body. Robbins states that PC churches “are often local from the start, having been created by evangelists with local roots” (Robbins 2004: 130). Robbins also goes on to state that PC Christianity is very much like a democracy bringing individuals into “modernity, introducing them to individualism and preparing them for lives in the global capitalist economy” (Ibid: 131). Though the political structure is not the forefront of this thesis it is still at the core of the organization. If the political structure cannot with stand change and time as the social does than Pentecostalism would not be able to handle such growing numbers of adherents (Coleman 2004:187).

Now that I have provided a more general outline of PC Christianity I will continue on more of the small-scale political dimensions I have observed. The pastor has responsibilities such as leading the congregation and creating PowerPoint presentations for Sunday service as well as talking to troubled individuals and visiting the ill in hospitals. He is also the head of the church and has responsibilities to oversee the staff and decisions made on the business side of the church.

The staff consists of numerous jobs ranging from secretaries and bookkeepers to worship leaders and children's church teachers. The staff work together to keep the church not only in business but able to tithe to the greater Assemblies of God organization as well as funding missions teams. When individuals tithe at Sunday service they often are given options as to where their funds will be distributed. For example when the missions team was going to Uganda and the Rucci family was in transition to plant a church in South Carolina there were options presented to tithe to Uganda, the Rucci family or the general church.

When a decision needs to be made, for instance on a new pastor, the members of the church will meet, discuss and later vote to resolve the matter. When the church senior pastor left and Rucci stepped up to the roll of both worship pastor and senior pastor a search was started for a new senior pastor. Several applicants had visited the church and presented their ideas and future intentions. As far as the decision for who would become the new senior pastor only members are able to vote and ultimately decide.

Though the First Assembly is a social community and religious organization it is also a business. The political structure intertwines with the social to form the identity of the group. While political aspects are not the focus of this research it is important to describe the hierarchy (adherents, members, church staff, pastor, God) and social construction when conducting research. The hierarchy is spiritually irrelevant however, because each individual is said to have the ability to communicate with the God.

## 7.2: Language versus Physicality in Rituals

### *Glossolalia (Speaking in Tongues)*

I found “words” and/or utterances to have a substantial amount of power when the words are presented within a certain ritual context (Tambiah 1968: 176). Though these utterances do have power, they must be authenticated through other modes of ritual such as Biblical scripture. If the message provided via glossolalia cannot be validated through the Word, it is considered the work of the “enemy” (the Devil). As Coleman states PC Christians often feel that through experiencing God’s gifts they are in essence more authentic Christians (2004: 21).

Glossolalia is also referred to as speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues is considered evidence of being “filled with the Holy Spirit,” yet there are instances such as private prayer language which is not considered a true filling of the Holy Spirit (Shoaps 2002: 8). Though speaking in tongues and prayer language are often used as synonyms the use of speaking in tongues as a divine message/communication and the use of a prayer language are considered two different gifts of the Spirit.

At the women’s retreat ritual aspects could easily be seen when the women met for a session and a young lady transitioned from speaking in her personal prayer language to then erupt in glossolalia under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Though both prayer language and glossolalia are described as speaking in tongues they are under very different circumstances, although I do view both as ritualistic in nature. In one circumstance, prayer language, the individual is communicating with their deity. In the

other situation, glossolalia via Holy Spirit, God is communicating back through the participant as a vessel in which the Holy Spirit can vocalize God's message.

The Holy Spirit is said to enter once an individual accepts Jesus Christ, when the participant decides to make a commitment to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, through Spirit Baptism, a deeper connection between individual and Holy Spirit can be reached. To be clear, not all members experience speaking in tongues as a message from God, but only as a prayer language. Some believers have the gift of prophecy, discernment, healing or other callings besides glossolalia. Often participants want to speak in tongues but the phenomenon does not always present itself immediately. As I illustrated above in the section regarding the Women's Retreat, there are numerous spiritual gifts, which vary from person to person. An overall majority of congregants do experience glossolalia as a confirmation of a baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The use of language in ritual at the Assembly is not limited to outbursts with the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned earlier the use of individual prayer is expected to yield results as well. In both bible studies the leader of the study would ask the attendants to provide people and/or situations to pray about. Then the individual would lead a prayer and ask for God's help and blessing in each situation. While the leader of the group did this others would bow their heads and pray individually, some slipping into their personal prayer languages. At other times during services one or two people would gather at the front and whisper blessings to help heal others who joined them. Though verbal language is an important element in PC ritual the non-verbal, physical aspects of worship are of equal significance.

*Physicality of prayer*

“In every religion dialogue with the gods calls for specific physical techniques” (de Heusch 1971: 151).

The physical element of prayer can pertain to an object or to the use of one's own body as an instrument of ritual. “Despite the importance of the written word, the Bible, Pentecostalism is foremost a religion of oral and bodily practices” (Lindhardt 2011: 220). Often participants will touch one another and pray over them, as healing hands are part of the prosperity gospel. I have seen and heard numerous instances where the healing touch of another has lessened the troubles of the sufferer.

Pastor Rucci told me that he was having terrible migraines, and after a period of time he went to a doctor. The doctor informed him that he had a brain tumor that needed to come out as soon as possible. He then asked the doctor to give him time to think about it, in that time he prayed for healing. One service he approached the senior pastor for healing, the pastor simply placed his hand on Rucci's forehead above his eye (coincidentally where the brain tumor was). After a month or so Rucci went back to the doctor, his pain had disappeared shortly after his meeting with the pastor; the doctor confirmed that the tumor was mysteriously gone.

The physical component is often combined with ‘words’ in my experience with the First Assembly. For example a woman's mother passed away, she came to the front of the room and said a prayer for the deceased. After which, Pastor Rucci came forward instructing the congregation to reach out their right hand and send prayers and healing her way. Pastor Rob gave a short prayer while everyone's hands were outstretched; others

mumbled quietly, some slipped into personal prayer languages. There were several times that the congregation was instructed to hold out their hands. The idea is to once again become a sort of vessel sending divine blessing and positive energy outward.

The physical element, in my research, is always present; even in silent prayer those nearby will reach out an arm toward a neighbor and pull them in for a close embrace. Within the physical element of ritual I include body language. The raising of an arm or both arms to facilitate the spiritual flow between the individual and God is an important physical action within PC ritual.

In Handprint the title alone alludes to the power of touch, the use of one's hands to create a lasting imprint in ritual. The use of the hands in worship is essential. People will raise their hands during musical worship, sometimes dancing or swaying to the music. People often hold hands during prayer, these are all non-verbal gestures which may seem meaningless yet they are key elements within PC ritual life.

“Laying hands on” is an expression in which participants will reach out their hands and/or physically touch an individual who needs healing for whatever ails them. When I spoke of the prayer shawl given to each woman during the Women's Retreat, that is a physical element, which assists an individual during a personal ritual worship. In my opinion ritual need not be a public enterprise. The physical element may be a bodily component or a tangible object that assists the individual(s) in the ritual.

### 7.3: Reassessing the Shamanism/Possession Divide

Individuals through Spirit baptism become filled with the Spirit and through this exchange (Shirer 2006) the participant will thereafter possess the Holy Spirit within them. Thus I argue that while these ritual experiences can elicit being filled with the Spirit there also exists a form of spiritual possession or embodiment, which occurs during and ever after a spiritual baptism. Once the individual has become “born again” they possess the Holy Spirit within them (Shirer 2006).

For example, Roland’s experience when God spoke to her as she lost her vehicle’s brakes, Pastor Rob’s story of falling asleep at the wheel on his drive back from college, only to be guided by the Holy Spirit. These are two instances that could have ended very differently if not for the spiritual possession by the Holy Spirit. In both cases the Holy Spirit comes through the individual's subconscious. In these cases I offer that there is a spiritual embodiment of the Holy Spirit within the Individual. It may not be a “true” spiritual possession because the individual does not experience the same degree of spiritual elation or change in state of being. In this case the individual has free will, yet is nonetheless influenced by the Holy Spirit. Thus illustrating a form of spiritual embodiment where the individual has control yet is cohabiting with a spiritual entity. Spiritual possession/embodiment is “an integration of spirit and matter, force or power and corporeal reality” (Boddy 1994: 407). Spiritual embodiment is an overarching paradigm, which encompasses possession as well as other phenomena that contain elements of supernatural embodiment. The notion of spiritual embodiment is enacted in

instances such as the ideology that Holy Spirit composes an individuals underlying subconscious.

Having said this I do find that when an individual bursts out into tongues of which they cannot understand, this is an act of spiritual possession. The participant has lost the ability to understand the intent of their words and is considered to be uttering the word of God. Another member of the group will come forward with the meaning, which is also given to them via the Holy Spirit. In one case there is spiritual possession while in the other, the discerner, spiritual embodiment.

Through the embodiment of the Holy Spirit, the individual receives gifts. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are numerous, the most notable being: speaking in tongues, healing and prophecy (Robbins 2010: 634). Robbins describes an account of Holy Spirit possession,

“As one man who had attended the mission school put it, up until the revival, he ‘pretended to read’ the Bible, but he did not really understand what he read. Once the revival started, ‘God’s spirit came and gave me strength and opened my eyes.’ From that point on, the ‘Bible was in the open’—he could read it and make sense of it in terms of his own life” (Robbins 2010: 644).

I encountered similar accounts from the participants at the First Assembly. One new member had expressed how his life’s troubles had gradually gone away as he gave himself over to the Holy Spirit. There are elements of both spiritual embodiment and spiritual possession within PC ritual in the Assembly.



## Chapter 8: Conclusion

To conclude, this research project focuses on the First Assembly of God Church in Fairbanks, Alaska. It sought to better understand the implementation of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in 21<sup>st</sup> century urban Alaska. I have argued that in addition to social activism and outreach it is the nature of ritual and worship that appeals to new adherents which makes Pentecostalism a success in Fairbanks, Alaska. I have asserted throughout this thesis that it is the ritual life, which draws individuals to the First Assembly and for that matter, all Assemblies of God Churches.

Academic literature often focuses on theology regarding conversion, rupture, empowerment, and modernization rather than the nature of Pentecostal Charismatic worship/ritual. Due to this gap in the literature my research becomes original and important. My research complements these studies by delving deeper into the unique ritualization processes of Pentecostal Charismatic Christians specifically within the Assemblies of God denomination.

In this MA thesis I have attempted to answer several questions regarding rituals among the Assemblies of God church in Fairbanks Alaska. To reiterate these questions; I first sought to examine what rituals were practiced at the First Assembly and how participants performed them, as well as the principles behind each ritual. I examined both the verbal and physical elements within the ritual process. I have illustrated the attractiveness of PC ritual life and I infer that this could explain the spread and apparent success. As I delved deeper into the life experiences of the adherents at the First

Assembly it became evident that individuals experienced speaking in tongues in different manners and this needed to be further explored. Through observing Spirit Baptism on several occasions I postulated that there may be a form of spiritual possession within Pentecostal worship/ritual life, thus I became interested in when these spiritual possessions/embodiment may happen and how believers express them.

In answering the first question I observed and participated in several rituals and social practices at the First Assembly. Bible Studies, the Women's retreat, Sunday service etc. Spontaneity was a key characteristic. Believers were often filled with the Spirit and began to speak in tongues with no understanding of what they were saying. At other times participants would share prophecies given to them by God through the Holy Spirit. The gift of discernment gave certain individuals the ability to understand messages from God. Healing seemed to occur on a daily basis. Individuals would have physical or emotional problems, which would be solved through the healing touch or words of others. There are said to be many Charismatic gifts from God I have presented the three most relevant in this research.

I have presented several methods of worship. First and foremost music as a form of worship is very important in creating a spiritually charged atmosphere for congregants. The music in a way provides lubrication for individuals to go from the everyday life to communal worship. Music also provides information to the participant, when the service has begun, when it ends and other social cues, which are important in ritual. Pentecostal Charismatic Christians are involved in their services and activities often using their bodies to respond to the spiritual stimulus. Believers will place their hands high,

outstretched to receive God's grace, some dance while others sing and sway. Holding ones hands and arms out is important whether to send healing to another or simply in worship.

I have found that there is a connection between the implementation of Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity and its ritual/worship. Many individuals will bounce from Church to church searching for a stronger connection with God. Several individuals I have spoken to say that they came to visit the First Assembly or other Assemblies of God and stayed/ became regular adherents due to the rich spiritual experience in worship, which they could simply not find elsewhere.

Glossolalia is an experience that varies not only from person to person but also between activities. For example many people will begin to speak in tongues as a private prayer language, which is not an indication of Spiritual Baptism. In other instances an individual will become filled with the Spirit and through the Holy Spirit will speak in tongues. The difference is when an individual uses his/her personal prayer language the believer is in control and is using tongues because he/she has no other way of expressing his/her spiritual experience, regular speech is simply not enough. Whereas when the individual is filled with the Spirit the Holy Spirit is relaying a message that is expressed through speaking in tongues. This message may not be understood by the individual the message has been passed through but through another in the group who possesses the gift of discernment and can tell the group of the meaning of the message. In this case the individual does not always have control when speaking in tongues, since it is not from the individual to God but from God to the individual. Much of the time a participant can keep

from blurting out the message at an inopportune moment. Saving the message, yet in certain forums (the Women's Retreat) there are times when speaking in tongues as a personal prayer voice may instigate a filling with the Spirit thus causing the second form of speaking in tongues.

The believer in this case is searching for deeper connection to God and that is the idea of Spirit Baptism. Spirit Baptism is an important experience of the New Testament and is very important within Pentecostal belief. Thus believers seek it and when they receive it the Spirit provides them with a 'gift' or 'fruit' which will guide the individual and create an ever deepening bond between follower and deity. So to summarize the Holy Spirit enters the individual once he or she accepts Christ as savior but only through Spirit Baptism/filling of the Spirit can the individual continue strengthening and deepening this bond with the Holy Spirit. There are many different spiritual "giftings" which demonstrate the power of Holy trinity and aid the individual throughout their lives. Some participants have told me that these gifts keep the believer on the correct path, the true Christian way of life providing guidance for verbal and physical action/behavior giving the individual a path through life.

There is a form of spiritual embodiment/possession present in PC Christianity. In looking at the truest sense of the term an individual who is influenced or controlled by a supernatural entity is a spiritual possession. This can be both positive and negative regarding the circumstance. In this case it is a positive experience for the believer as they are united with the Holy Spirit in a moment of spiritual ecstasy. Throughout this thesis I have afforded various examples of possible spiritual embodiment/possession among

Pentecostal Charismatics in Alaska. I fully assert that there is indeed a form of spiritual possession. Through ritual and spiritual phenomena individuals will convert to Pentecostalism, they stay for the intense and active spiritual worship and this directly affects the success of Pentecostalism Charismatic Christianity overall.

Understanding the Holy Spirit and its role in the life of the individual is very complex and debated even among church members. Initially I thought that once the Spirit enters the individual it was a form of constant possession, seeing as the Holy Spirit is said to reside in the practitioner for the rest of his/her life. I later came to the conclusion that it is useful to distinguish two different phenomena, spiritual possession and an overarching spiritual embodiment.

#### *Future Research*

For future studies it would be important to explore other Assemblies of God churches to solidify the above argument, which I have presented, as well as providing a larger sample of AG participants, which would provide deeper insight into personal experiences of worship.

I think it would be interesting to study the role of language and utterances among the Spirit Baptized and within Pentecostal worship overall. There has already been some linguistic research conducted among Pentecostal groups elsewhere. However, there is a need for a linguistic component within the research conducted in Alaska within the Assemblies of God denominations.

I would also like to conduct further research on church planting and the role of apostle(s) within Pentecostalism. Pastor Rucci has indicated that church “planting” is considered a spiritual gifting or ‘fruit’ of the Spirit. Rucci demonstrates that the Holy Spirit within has provided all the elements and given him direction. If Rucci follows this guidance, furthering his divine given gift of apostle, then it is said that the gift will bear fruit(s). There are many layers to the concept of spiritual/Charismatic gifting which need to be further explored.

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## Appendices A Assembly of God (AG) Statistical Information

### U.S. AG CHURCHES OPENED AND CLOSED 1965-2012

<u>Year</u> <sup>1</sup>	<u>Opened</u> <sup>2</sup>	<u>Closed</u> <sup>2</sup>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Net Change</u>
1965-66	222	231	8,443	-9
1966-67	202	139	8,506	63
1967-68	102	98	8,510	4
1968-69	210	150	8,570	60
1969-70	169	120	8,619	49
1970-71	230	115	8,734	115
1971-72	209	144	8,799	65
1972-73	247	175	8,871	72
1973-74	186	137	8,920	49
1974-75	214	115	9,019	99
1975-76	232	111	9,140	121
1976-77	197	129	9,208	68
1977-78	214	131	9,291	83
1978-79	263	144	9,410	119
1979-80	301	149	9,562	152
1980-81	338	127	9,773	211
1981	269	112	9,930	157
1982	400	157	10,173	243
1983	343	130	10,386	213
1984	355	159	10,582	196
1985	326	147	10,761	179
1986	291	166	10,886	125
1987	308	190	11,004	118
1988	311	192	11,123	119
1989	285	216	11,192	69
1990	340	179	11,353	161
1991	368	185	11,536	183
1992	334	181	11,689	153
1993	276	203	11,762	73
1994	263	261	11,764	2
1995	274	215	11,823	59
1996	244	183	11,884	61
1997	238	202	11,920	36
1998	288	271	11,937	17
1999	315	197	12,055	118
2000	255	226	12,084	29
2001	220	222	12,082	-2
2002	247	196	12,133	51
2003	327	238	12,222	89
2004	280	225	12,277	55
2005	258	237	12,298	21
2006	276	263	12,311	13
2007	309	258	12,362	51
2008	247	232	12,377	15

Figure A-1: U.S. AG Churches Opened and Closed (1965-2008). This data has been provided by <http://ag.org/top/about/statistics/index.cfm>. It shows the numbers of churches opened and closed from 1965 to 2012. This data is spread out over two pages.

**U.S. AG CHURCHES OPENED AND CLOSED  
1965-2012**

<u>Year</u> <sup>1</sup>	<u>Opened</u> <sup>2</sup>	<u>Closed</u> <sup>2</sup>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Net Change</u>
2009	266	272	12,371	-6
2010	325	239	12,457	86
2011	368	230	12,595	138
<b>2012</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>12,722</b>	<b>127</b>

<sup>1</sup> Reporting periods have varied through the years. As of December 1981, reports are based on the calendar year ending December 31.

<sup>2</sup> May include occasional churches closed/opened in error, and subsequently re-opened/closed.

Figure A-2: U.S. AG Churches Opened and Closed (2009-2012). Here the Assemblies of God show that 391 new churches were opened in the year 2012. This shows that church planting is more active now than ever before. It also shows that congregations are growing which is facilitated via new churches. Provided by <http://ag.org/top/about/statistics/index.cfm>



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2010 Annual Church Ministries Report (ACMR)  
AG U.S. National Women's Ministries Department

Districts	Women's Ministries	
	Groups	Members
01 Alabama	225	6,194
51 Alaska	60	1,157
02 Appalachian	81	1,187
03 Arizona	156	7,043
04 Arkansas	277	6,139
59 Brazilian	44	951
71 Central	94	2,883
06 Georgia	173	4,622
60 German	7	89
72 Gulf Latin American	275	8,885
53 Hawaii	68	2,436
07 Illinois	208	10,070
08 Indiana	174	5,295
39 Iowa	75	2,106
09 Kansas	105	2,816
10 Kentucky	116	2,311
57 Korean	82	4,697
11 Louisiana	163	5,128
12 Michigan	181	6,639
73 Midwest Latin America	74	2,695
13 Minnesota	166	7,879
14 Mississippi	109	2,059
15 Montana	57	3,127
62 National Slavic	8	218
16 Nebraska	66	1,909
18 New Jersey	182	6,034
19 New Mexico	71	2,069
20 New York	241	6,358
21 North Carolina	186	5,229
22 North Dakota	40	983
38 North Texas	387	16,054
23 Northern California-N	342	17,482
45 Northern Missouri	62	1,973
17 Northern New England	78	1,665
68 Northern Pacific Lati	179	5,993
24 Northwest	256	12,890
25 Ohio	197	5,976
26 Oklahoma	347	9,079
27 Oregon	143	5,126
32 Peninsular Florida	283	16,702
05 Pennsylvania-Delaware	278	9,257
28 Potomac	230	8,639

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Figure A-3: 2010 Annual Church Ministries Report: Women's Department. This figure illustrates the number Women's Ministries among the Assemblies of God Churches in 2010. In Alaska 60 women's ministries held approximately 1,157 members. Presented by the Assemblies of God (<http://ag.org/top/about/statistics/index.cfm>).

## AG WORLDWIDE CHURCHES AND ADHERENTS 1987-2011

<i>Year</i>	<i>-----United States-----</i>		<i>Countries in which we have -- partnership or mission activity --</i>		<i>-----Sub-Totals-----</i>	
	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Adherents</i>	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Adherents</i>	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Adherents</i>
1987	11,004	2,160,667	115,623	15,816,435	126,627	17,977,102
1988	11,123	2,147,041	117,450	16,269,817	128,573	18,416,858
1989	11,192	2,137,890	117,115	16,414,392	128,307	18,552,282
1990	11,353	2,181,502	137,063	21,589,070	148,416	23,770,572
1991	11,536	2,234,708	140,671	22,723,215	152,207	24,957,923
1992	11,689	2,257,846	141,935	22,570,692	153,624	24,828,538
1993	11,762	2,271,718	139,119	23,176,655	150,881	25,448,373
1994	11,764	2,324,615	144,372	23,994,400	156,136	26,319,015
1995	11,823	2,387,982	148,676	25,219,790	160,499	27,607,772
1996	11,884	2,467,588	146,348	25,362,718	158,232	27,830,306
1997	11,920	2,494,574	174,657	28,155,905	186,577	30,650,479
1998	11,937	2,525,812	178,528	29,532,588	190,465	32,058,400
1999	12,055	2,574,531	200,467	32,002,437	212,522	34,576,968
2000	12,084	2,577,560	210,435	35,651,706	222,519	38,229,266
2001	12,082	2,627,029	222,471	38,244,062	234,553	40,871,091
2002	12,133	2,687,366	236,022	40,246,064	248,155	42,933,430
2003	12,222	2,729,562	248,991	41,863,616	261,213	44,593,178
2004	12,277	2,779,095	256,209	43,615,601	268,486	46,394,696
2005	12,298	2,830,861	268,183	45,734,374	280,481	48,565,235
2006	12,311	2,836,174	283,413	48,157,995	295,724	50,994,169
2007	12,362	2,863,265	299,686	51,275,350	312,048	54,138,615
2008	12,377	2,899,702	320,034	52,803,685	332,411	55,703,387
2009	12,371	2,914,669	333,737	54,311,810	346,108	57,226,479
2010	12,457	3,030,944	338,472	55,699,506	350,929	58,730,450
2011	12,595	3,041,957	345,165	57,188,874	357,760	60,230,831

**Worldwide total adherents** (including countries/territories *not* considered mission fields, with AG adherents):

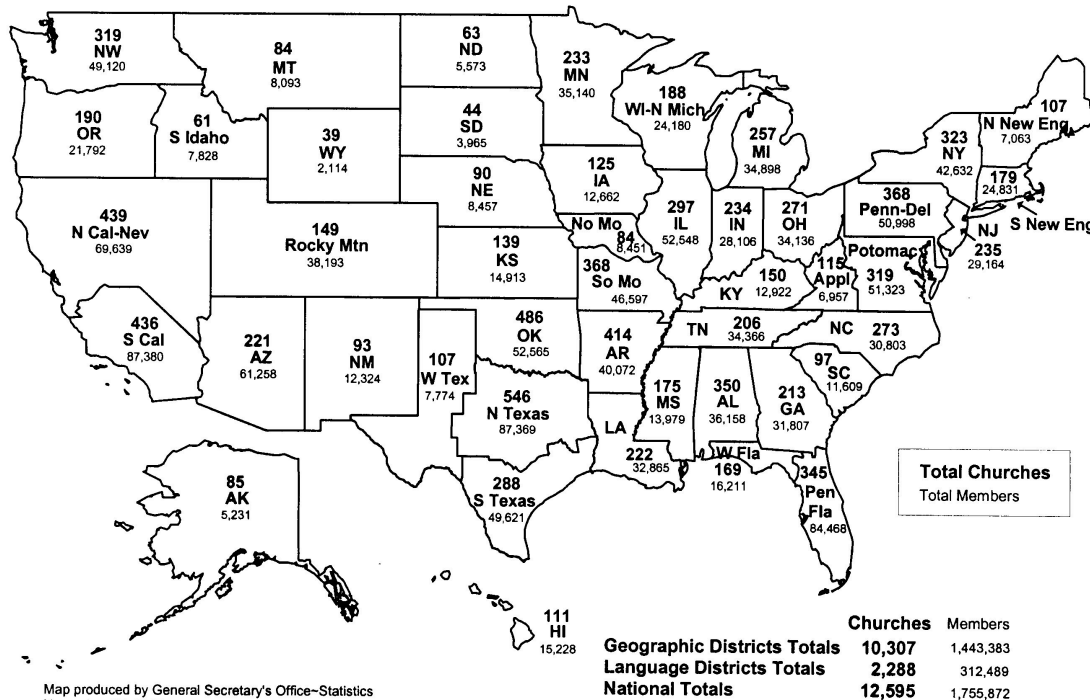
*annual change: numeric and percent*

2003	50,718,028		
2004	52,534,858	1,816,830	3.6%
2005	54,717,677	2,182,819	4.2%
2006	57,023,562	2,305,885	4.2%
2007	60,047,420	3,023,858	5.3%
2008	61,550,938	1,503,518	2.5%
2009	63,090,251	1,539,313	2.5%
2010	64,100,671	1,010,420	1.6%
<b>2011</b>	<b>65,398,796</b>	<b>1,298,125</b>	<b>2.0%</b>

NOTE: Adherents are all persons who consider an AG (Assemblies of God) church to be their church home.  
"Countries in which we have partnership or mission activity" data includes Pentecostal elements with whom Assemblies of God World Missions has a fraternal relationship, even though they may not use the term "Assemblies of God" to identify themselves.

Figure A-4: AG Worldwide Churches and Adherents (1987-2011). The Assemblies of God often post statistics of their progress over the years. This is a worldwide count of adherents from 1987 to 2011, which shows the increase in attendance throughout the years. Provided by <http://ag.org/top/about/statistics/index.cfm>.

### 2011 Churches and Members Assemblies of God Geographic Districts



Map produced by General Secretary's Office-Statistics  
November 27, 2012

Figure A-5: AG Churches and Member Statistics by Geographical District, 2011. This is a map of the number of churches and total members in the year 2011. Here Alaska is shown with 85 total churches and 5,231 members in the Assembly of God organization. Provided by <http://ag.org/top/about/statistics/index.cfm>.

Appendix B Photographs



Figure B-1: Original (First) Assembly Church, the beginnings. Built in 1944 out of spruce logs. This was the Northern most Assembly of God church. In 1944 Charles O. Hirschy states, “As we daily work away on the building, we realize that it will doubtless be the scene of the salvation of many souls. Our prayer is that we may be found faithful in the furtherance of the gospel in the great interior of Alaska.” Photo and quote provided via the First Fairbanks Assembly of God Church Archives.



Figure B-2: The First Assembly of God Church in Fairbanks, AK (field site). Photo provided via the Fairbanks First Assembly archives.

## Appendix C Fairbanks AG Mileposts (1939-1989)

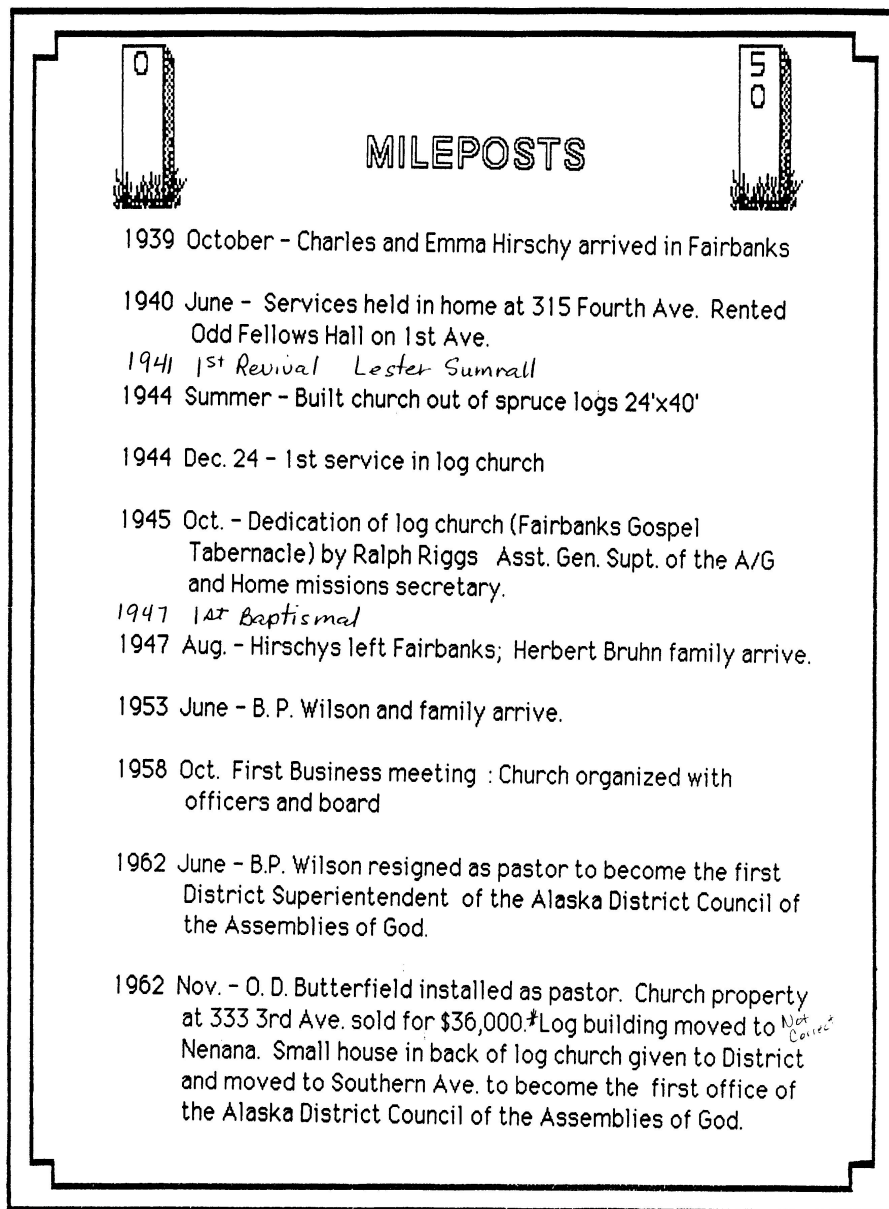


Figure C-1: Fairbanks AG Mileposts (1939-1962). This is a pamphlet provided by the First Assembly Archives illustrating various milestones from 1939 to 1989. It is three pages in length. This first section illustrates mileposts from 1939 through 1962. Including the first arrival of the Hirschy family, who began planting the first Assembly of God Church in Fairbanks.

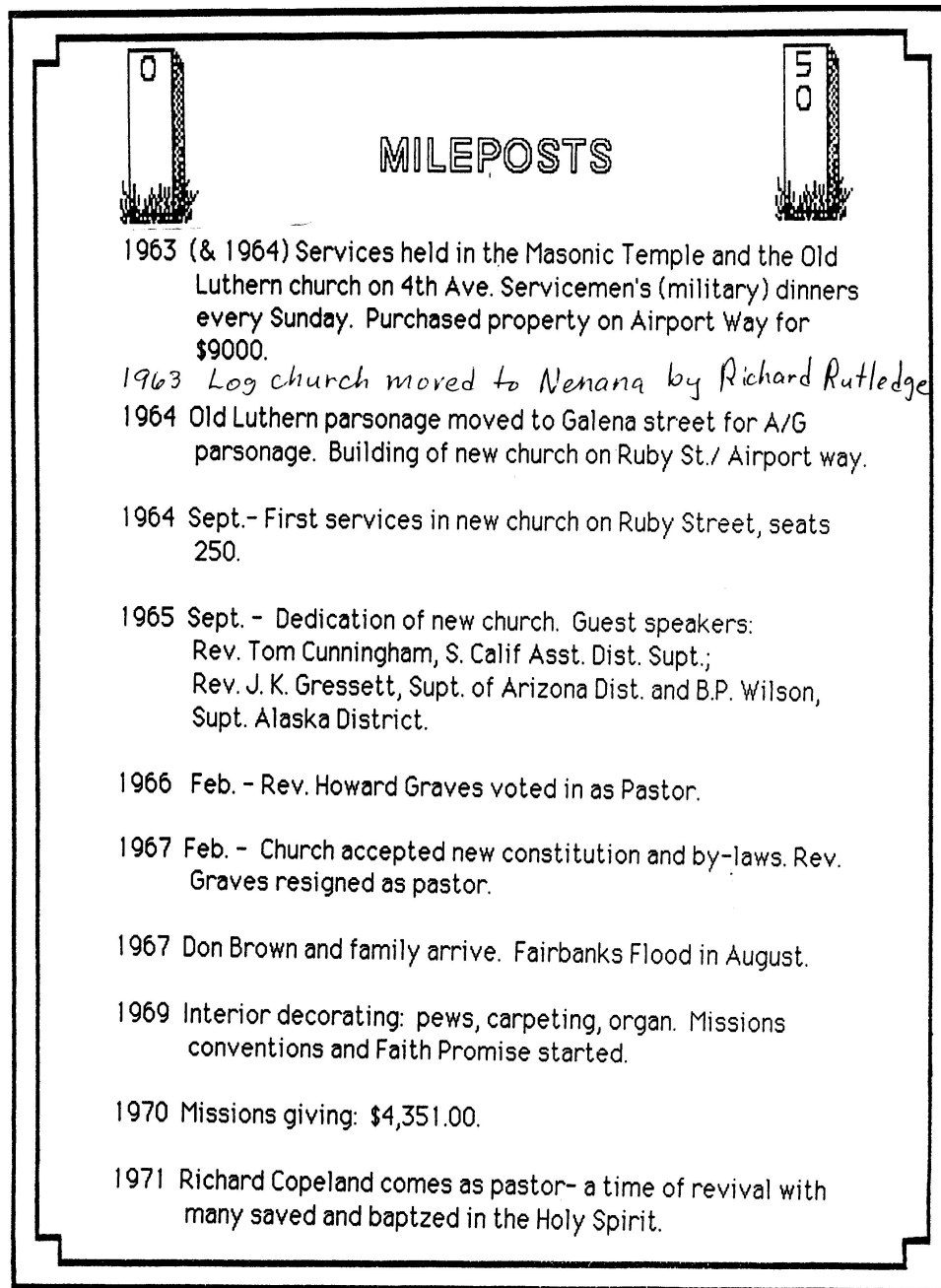
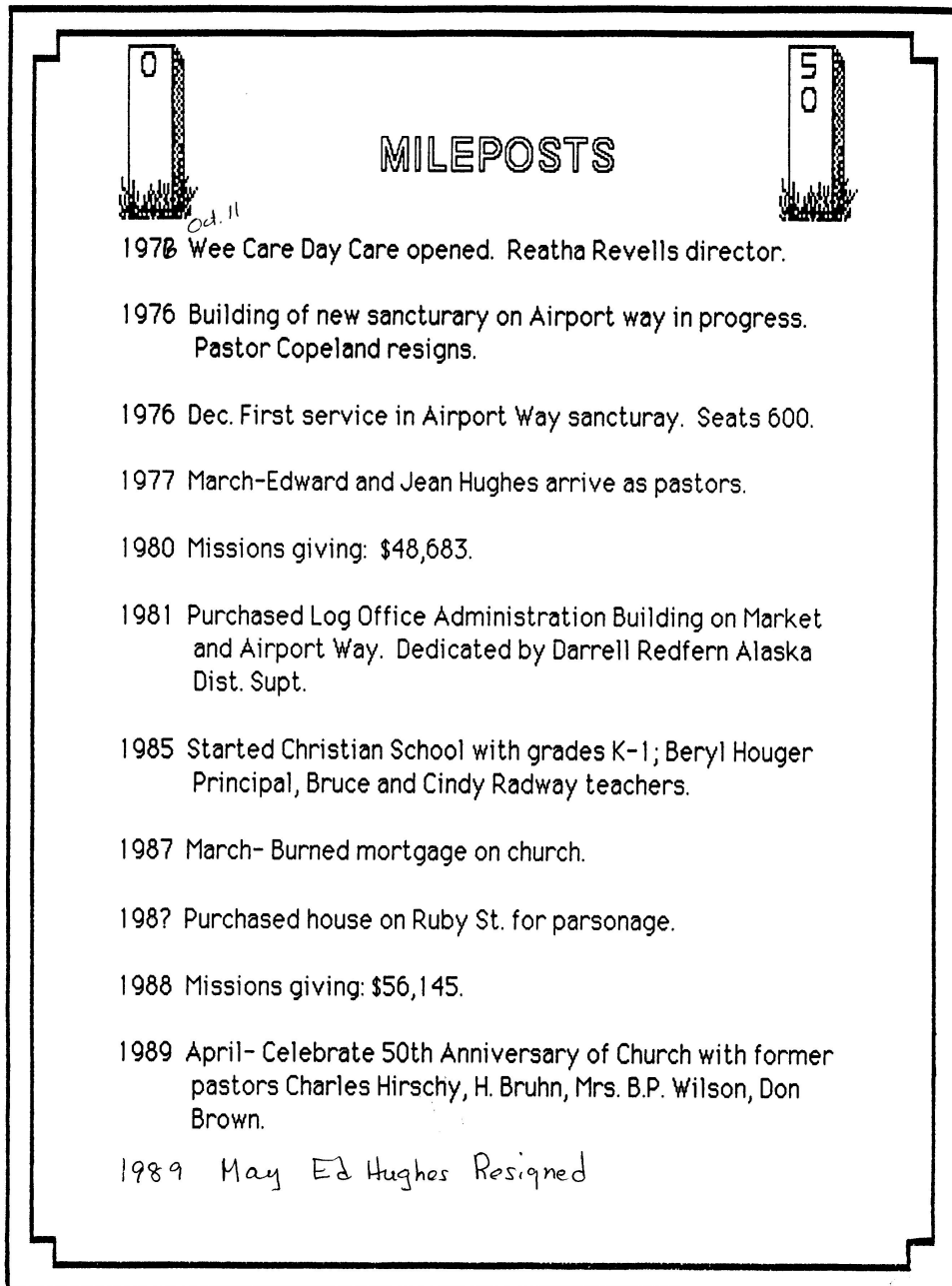


Figure C-2: Fairbanks AG Mileposts (1963-1971). This section demonstrates the mobility and constant movement of the church. Also important to note is the spiritual revival in 1971, demonstrating the attractiveness and spread of Pentecostalism in Fairbanks.



*Information compiled by Elizabeth Baker from letters, mag. articles,  
pictures, minutes, - for 50<sup>th</sup> anniv. Apr 1989*

Figure C-3: Fairbanks AG Mileposts (1976-1989). In 1976 members began building the Church they practice in today, the Church this research centers upon.