A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF NATIVE VILLAGE PASTORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE ALASKA SCHOOL OF MINISTRY

Cynthia L. Cohen
Southeastern University - Lakeland

Follow this and additional works at: https://firescholars.seu.edu/coe

Part of the Adult and Continuing Education Commons, Educational Leadership Commons, Higher Education Commons, and the Religious Education Commons

Recommended Citation
https://firescholars.seu.edu/coe/40

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by FireScholars. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Education (Ed.D) by an authorized administrator of FireScholars. For more information, please contact firescholars@seu.edu.
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF NATIVE VILLAGE
PASTORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE
ALASKA SCHOOL OF MINISTRY

By

CYNTHIA L. H. COHEN

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the
College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Education
in Curriculum and Instruction

Southeastern University
March 12, 2019
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF NATIVE VILLAGE PASTORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ALASKA SCHOOL OF MINISTRY

by

CYNTHIA L. H. COHEN

Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Kevin Weaver, Ed.D., Dissertation Chair

Dr. Janet Deck, Ed.D., Committee Member

Dr. Wade Cogan, Ed.D., Committee Member

Dr. James Anderson, Ph.D., Dean, College of Education
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior, thanking Him for His sustaining power. I would not have completed this process without His help; He literally moved the earth to motivate me to finish. I also dedicate this work to my wonderful family who provided unwavering support, encouragement, and love through the entire Ed.D. process. First, to my husband, Alan, who endured my late-night typing sessions. To my children, Austin and Bethany, who I am sure were tired of my “I have homework” comments. To my parents, Ralph and Rita, and my sisters (Karen, Kathy, and Michelle) who continually prayed for me and reminded me that I was doing it “for the Lord and not for men” and that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” To Dr. Rachel McGee, who was so gracious to be my chauffeur and roommate during my travels to Florida; you are a true friend. Finally, to my students and staff family at Eagle River Christian School/King’s Way Ministry Center, who were my cheerleaders and prayer warriors. And yes, Xavier, I finished my paper.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the faculty of Southeastern University for their support and guidance. Dr. Patty LeBlanc, thank you for your assistance. I would not have been able to attend my first intensive nor would I have survived the last one without you. Thank you to Dr. Kevin Weaver and Dr. Janet Deck for your encouragement and support throughout the dissertation process. Finally, thank you to Dr. Wade Cogan, my third reader and mentor. I have learned so much about myself and the Alaska School of Ministry through your mentorship. Thank you all for not allowing me to quit.
ABSTRACT

The Alaska School of Ministry (AKSOM) was established to provide ministerial education venues in Alaska. This phenomenological study queried pastors who provide ministry in Alaska Native villages to examine their perceptions of AKSOM and perceived effects of the program on their ministries and villages. Fifteen participants, including students and AKSOM leaders from various ethnicities, were interviewed. Transcripts were analyzed to discover common themes. Five themes were noted, which included relationship (fellowship, local, approachable), flexibility, empowerment (support, confidence), practicality, and financial feasibility. All leaders and students perceived the program as a valuable and effective education tool in preparation for ministry in Alaska.

*Keywords:* ministerial education, Alaska ministry, school of ministry, pastor perceptions
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication ........................................................................................................... i
Acknowledgments ............................................................................................... ii
Abstract ............................................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ................................................................................................. iv

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose Statement</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Methodology</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Adult Education</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Responsive Education</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministerial Education</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry Education in Alaska</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction/Statement of Problem</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Research Design</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Researcher</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures for Ethical Protection</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruments used in Data Collection</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. INTRODUCTION

In his book to the Romans, the Apostle Paul asked three poignant questions: “How then shall they call on the One in whom they have not trusted? And how shall they trust in the One they have not heard of? And how shall they hear without someone proclaiming?” (Romans 10:14, Tree of Life Version). These questions are still appropriate today in Alaska. Due to the remoteness of location, many Alaska villages do not have a consistent evangelical witness (Campbell, 2005). For years, the inhabitants of these villages were made to feel as if they were inferior human beings (Guthridge, 2006) and incapable of spiritual leadership (John, 1996).

A shift in the focus of the Alaska Ministry Network leadership led to the creation of the Alaska School of Ministry (AKSOM), which began teaching in the villages in 2009 with the motto “Equipping Alaskans for Alaska Ministry.” This motto follows the indigenous church principles outlined by Hodges (1953) and is accomplished by sending the school to the students in the native environment. This study is an attempt to discover what Alaska pastors perceive as the effects of the Alaska School of Ministry on their ministries as well as any effects upon their villages.

Background and Review of Relevant Literature

For over 200 years, Alaska Natives have been engaged in an internal battle. This battle continues between two distinct cultures: the “Native” way and the “White” way. The “Native” way includes hundreds of years of village tradition while the “White” way involves progressive
American culture. The impact of this battle continues to have a lasting effect on its people and their perceptions of themselves, not just of education and religion.

Before one can understand the importance of the educational perspectives of Alaska Natives, an understanding of who an Alaska Native is must be reached. Alaska Natives are ranked as the “sixth largest overall population of indigenous people in the United States” (Barnhardt, 2001, p. 1). These individuals represent 16.4% of the population within the state of Alaska. There are 20 different language groups within the four major language families native to Alaska (Holton, 2016). The distinctness is not only based on language, but on geographic location and culture (Barnhardt, 2001).

Many of the Alaska Natives residing in rural Alaska live throughout 209 villages in which the populations range between 25 and 5,000 residents. According to Norton and Manson (1996), these are people groups who have lost their ancestral lands, had their native languages destroyed, and been restricted from traditional means of acquiring their clothing, shelter, and food. The cultural beliefs within their communities have not been respected.

The internal struggle for Native Alaskans dates back to the early 1800s before Alaska became a territory. According to Barnhardt (2001), the Civilization Fund Act set aside funds with which religious groups were contracted by the federal government to conduct schools for the “American Indian” children. The assumption of both the government and the religious entities was that the individual needs were best fulfilled through the promotion of “civilization.”

Advancement of Christianity also played an enormous role in this idea of civilization as well as education. Before the United States’ purchase of Alaska, much of the formal education was provided by the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian-American Company. Schools were provided in Kodiak, Southeast Alaska, and the Aleutian Islands (Barnhardt, 2001). The
practice of sending Native students to boarding schools was also instituted during this time. Boarding schools perpetuated the idea of “assimilation through segregation” (Barnhardt, 2001, p. 9).

According to Russell (2009), the first Tlingit experience with Christianity and education was in Sitka in the 1830s. A Russian Orthodox priest named Fr. Ivan Veniaminov began his evangelism campaign. When a smallpox epidemic led to the deaths of many elders and even the Shamans of the clan, the villagers began to accept Fr. Veniaminov and his religious beliefs.

In 1867, Alaska was purchased from the Russian Empire, even though Russia did not actually own the majority of the property it sold. Weakened by smallpox epidemics, the Alaska Natives did not feel as if they could win if they decided to fight (Russell, 2009). Thus, the “religious, spiritual, educational, and linguistic systems of the colonized people suffered major disruptions,” (Roderick, 2010, p. 68). They were forced to give up their entire way of life.

Not only did the newly arriving missionaries bring education to the Arctic, they also brought religious factionalism, separation, division, and disunity. As the missionaries (many of whom were school teachers) assembled in Alaska, a large portion of the Protestant groups instigated a movement to abolish totem poles and the practice of carving them. Not understanding the culture, the missionaries saw the totems as pagan idols (Russell, 2009). In Krupa’s (1997) interview with Chief Peter John, the village elder discussed the contradiction in the lives of the arriving Christians and teachers. In school, he was taught by the missionaries how to read and how much God loved him, yet the same missionaries would hit him with a switch for speaking in his native language.

Halliday (1998) reported that there were over 12,000 Eskimos living in private communities throughout the immense Yup’ik region in the 1880s. Missionaries from the
Moravian Church tried to initiate change in this culture by inviting themselves into the villages. Halliday (1998) noted, “Going into a village without an invitation from an individual or family is tantamount to entering a private home without knocking” (p. 83). Not only did these missionaries offend the villagers, they brought measles and flu epidemics into the villages as well. The broadcast of disease hindered the already unpleasant perception the Alaska Natives held toward “White” men.

In 1884, the Organic Act was passed. This legislation established the first civil government in Alaska and provided a legal foundation for the implementation of a federal education. Sheldon Jackson, a missionary transferred from Colorado, became the General Agent of Education for Alaska during this time. He came to “continue Christianizing the Native peoples of America” (Carlton, 1999, p. 9). He had a strict “English Only” policy which directed all decisions, including the decisions of language use and curriculum (Barnhardt, 2001).

Seeing a need for education and systematic missionary activity, Jackson decided to combine the two (Huckins, 2000). As the Agent of Education, he created contract schools with various missionary groups, including Catholics, Moravians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Congregationalists, and Swedish Evangelicals. Even though these schools were considered public schools, according to Haycox (2016), Christian missionaries were used as teachers since the mindset at the time was that “Christianity was one of the distinguishing characteristics of civilized life” (p. 5). The teachers would provide both moral and intellectual instruction.

Russian Orthodox church leaders did not support Jackson or his ideals for assimilation (Carlton, 1999).

In the 1990s, students were still not allowed to speak their native languages nor were the Native ideals allowed to be portrayed or reflected in curriculum, even after the passage of the
Native American Language Act of 1990. Fortunately, village high schools were developed in this same decade, finally allowing students to be educated past the eighth grade (Barnhardt, 2001). Over the last ten years, the return to Native culture and language studies have returned to the Alaska schools.

The attempts at assimilation left Alaska Natives with a distaste for Christianity as well as a confusion about their identity. For Native students, this tug-of-war on culture has left them feeling confused. Reyhner (2006) pointed out that one of the reasons that Native students are at risk for dropping out of school is their perception of self and culture. Merle, a student in the village of Gambell, shared his perceptions of Alaska Native life:

Sometimes I think that it’s like this: We used to roar like lions, and we hunted like lions. We were a pride, and we had pride. Then tigers came along and said that we should live like tigers. We told ourselves, ‘Shouldn’t we be more like them – more individualistic?’ So we tried to roar like tigers and live like tigers. But soon we realized we weren’t tigers. And then we found out that we weren’t lions anymore either. (Guthridge, 2006, p. 77)

Another issue related to culture and perception is Alaska Native mannerisms. Alaska Natives are slow in speech and methodical about what they are going to say. They listen fully and pause before speaking again. Proverbs 13:3 (New International Version), ties so well with this subject: “Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin.” But this same mannerism of reserve has been perceived in the past as the students being ignorant and unteachable (Fienup-Riordan, 1990; Guthridge, 2006). These otherwise intelligent students would be tracked into low-achieving classes and groups, putting them at risk for dropping out of school (Reyhner, 2006).
Understanding and respecting the culture of the Alaska Natives is important. Just as the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:22 (New International Version) became “all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some,” so should those in the religious and educational fields relate to the individuals we are trying to help. Saggio and Rendon (2004) noted, “Spirituality is an integral value that pervades all aspects of life…Native thinking views religious life as part of one’s identity” (p. 225). The authors continued to say that “religious faith and religious figures were very influential in fostering persistence behavior in students” (Saggio & Rendon, 2004, p. 230). Churches are now exploring the incorporation of some cultural values back into worship, as long as they do not compromise Biblical truths or move the center of worship away from Christ (Huckins, 2000).

The reluctance of Natives to control ministries is also changing (Huckins, 2000). Alaska Natives were told for many years that they could not be spiritual leaders and must follow the lead of the missionary. Churches are educating their pastors and returning to the indigenous church principles which was made popular by Melvin Hodges in the 1950s. He defined indigenous as “produced, growing, or living naturally in a country or climate; native; inherent” (Hodges, 1953, p. 7). Brock (1981) took the principle even farther by implying that people need to be met where they are.

The answer is not condoning or giving approval to all the native thought, leaving the people where they are. Rather, it is to take them where they are, patiently lead them into the light of God’s Word, and trust the Holy Spirit to bring enlightenment and conviction. (p. 49)

Stetzer and Dodson (2007) explained that churches must become “indigenous, taking root in the soil of their society and reflecting, appropriately, their culture” (p. 6). Guthridge (2006)
thought the reason that the Eskimos have survived for the many thousands of years is “Not by attempting to alter the environment, as the White man has tried, but by synthesizing whatever the environment gave him” (p. 161).

**Conceptual Framework**

The concept of the study was based on the phenomenological approach, a qualitative research methodology examining the assumptions, perceptions, and feelings of participants. The study employed the systematic approach to interview transcript interpretation introduced by Moustakas (1994). The study examined the underlying principles of the andragogical model from Knowles (1983) and effective education delivery methods.

**Significance of the Study**

The study examined the perceptions of pastors providing ministry within the Alaska Native village context who attended AKSOM. Since AKSOM is a member of the Association of District Schools of Ministry (ADSOM), the study could be replicated within the other District Schools of Ministry (DSOMs) to determine the perceived effectiveness of the program for attendees. The study examined the adult educational principles employed by AKSOM, thus the results of the study would be useful to other indigenous people groups as well as other adult educational programs when considering the creation of other adult programs.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore native village pastors’ perceptions of the Alaska School of Ministry (AKSOM). The phenomenon to be researched analyzed the experiences shared by each pastor studying under AKSOM. Other areas of consideration included the discovery of how AKSOM assisted these pastors in the achievement
of their calling in light of the remoteness of their villages, as well as any perceived effects the program had on their villages.

Methodology

The study was completed using the phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2016), a phenomenological case study “attempts to understand people’s perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation,” (p. 255). Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) described phenomenology as discovering the meaning of an experience, activity, or concept from the participant’s perspective.

The study sample was composed of the directors of AKSOM as well as ten pastors from Native Alaskan villages from varying Native corporations. The pastors were chosen based on their AKSOM attendance. Due to the remoteness of the villages, the interviews were conducted April 24-28, 2017, during the Alaska Ministry Network Conference. The interviews employed structured and semi-structured interview guides developed by the researcher (see Appendices A and B for interview guides).

Research Questions

Students and leaders of the Alaska School of Ministry were invited to participate in a study to investigate their perceptions of the school. The study included the following questions:

- How do pastors in Alaska Native Villages perceive the Alaska School of Ministry?
- What are the perceived effects of the Alaska School of Ministry on ministries and villages of these pastors?

Analysis

As stated above, the study was completed using the phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry. The researcher attempted to uncover the perceptions and perspectives of the pastors in Native Alaskan villages toward AKSOM (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). As Gay, Mills,
and Airasian (2012) suggested, this study discovered what “meaning” or intrinsic value AKSOM had in the ministries of the pastors and what value, if any, had been added to their villages.

The researcher interviewed pastors from Alaska Native villages as well as the directors of AKSOM regarding their perception of the school on pastoral ministry. The interview template utilized open-ended questions (see Appendices A and B for interview guides). The interviews were recorded and transcribed to discover patterns and themes relating to ministerial perceptions. A line-by-line discourse analysis was performed. Interview data was coded to develop emergent themes, patterns, and perceptions.

**Limitations**

The study included 15 participants from various regions throughout Alaska. Due to travel limitations and the number of AKSOM students, the inclusion of all students was not feasible. Interviews for the study were conducted at a central location during a statewide ministry conference, not within the village context. The investigator was unable to conduct observations within the village AKSOM venues due to travel constraints.

**Summary**

As with other religious groups, the Assemblies of God in Alaska has experienced difficulties in obtaining ministers for vacant churches in rural Alaska. Through the attempts of Christian missionaries to civilize Alaska’s indigenous tribal groups, many Alaska Natives distrust western educational and religious entities. Missionaries did not promote an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect; thus, positive relationships were not fostered, leaving villagers discouraged and deficient of self-efficacy in ministry. Alaska Natives must be respected as the valuable people they were created to be and empowered to achieve their ministry potential.
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Since the first General Council of the Assemblies of God in 1914, the method for educating pastors has been in question (Blumhofer, 1989). A resolution passed in 1949 would “forever oppose the idea of demanding academic degrees for ordination” (McGee, 2004, p. 335), thus alternative methods of ministerial education were born. Traveling to the Native villages in Alaska as an alternate method for ministerial education has been happening since the original Bible school circuit in 1962 (Aiken, 2017). The review of the literature examined principles and methods of adult education, cultural aspects of education, principles of ministerial education, and ministerial education within Alaska.

“Going to school is a child’s full-time job! Adults, in contrast, have many other roles and responsibilities” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 11). Educational settings include formal, nonformal, and informal. Caffarella and Daffron (2013) labeled the approaches as conventional or traditional, pragmatic or practical, and radical. Pragmatic educators provide programs that are flexible enough to adapt for culture and context. Educators must understand the culture and context before planning the program. Understanding is accomplished through building relationships. They must be able to discover what is relevant within the culture. According to Rossiter (2017), “educational relationships serve to strengthen confidence and efficacy beliefs in relation to positive possible selves for adult learners” (p. 12).
The role of the teacher is to promote development and learning through interaction (Cranton, 2001). She stated the following:

The caring teacher centers himself on the student as a person. He is concerned with establishing a warm and friendly atmosphere in the classroom, providing support, encouraging good relationships among students, and making sure the needs and feelings of each individual are considered. He genuinely and empathetically listens. He goes out of his way, gives up his own time, and takes those extra steps to ensure students are comfortable in their learning experience. (p. 30)

According to Merriam and Bierema (2014), “Creating good learning experiences for adults is what andragogy is all about” (p. 44). Learning experiences include the physical as well as the psychological atmosphere, allowing students to feel comfortable and respected. For items to be retained in memory, Sousa (2011) stated they must make sense, connect with prior experiences, and have meaning, which pertains to relevance of the information. Cranton (2001) believed for meaningful learning to occur, educators must have an “authentic connection” (p. 73) with students. “In order to communicate in a meaningful way, there must be some connection between the people involved in the communication. The greater the connection, or relationship, between the people, the more likely the communication is meaningful” (Cranton, 2001, p. 73).

Maxwell (2007) correlated relationship depth with individual potential and describes why connection is related to leader effectiveness. “Because you first have to touch people’s hearts before you ask them for a hand. That is the Law of Connection,” (p. 115). Connection occurs through trust. “Learners are more likely to engage in a deep approach to learning in a climate of mutual trust and respect,” (Pratt, 1998, p. 129).

Teachers must also inspire students to build self-esteem and confidence within
themselves. Wlodkowski (2008) believed atmosphere and relationship also affect a student’s motivation to learn. “Instructors can help adults learn to be confident by establishing conditions that engender competence” (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 112). Students desire inclusion and acceptance without judgment. When students feel safe to experiment, they will also feel empowered to succeed (Lawler & King, 2000).

Flexibility is important for the learning process. According to Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012), “andragogy works best in practice when it is adapted to fit the uniqueness of the learners and the learning situation” (p. 3). With this adaptation, adult education can be varied situationally, thus difficult to define. Adult education has three possible meanings: a) an adult learning process, b) an “organized set of activities to accomplish a set of objectives”, and c) “movement or a field of social practice” (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012, p. 143). Knowles (1983) defined the andragogical model as “a system of elements that can be adopted or adapted in whole or in part. It is not an ideology that must be applied totally and without modification” (p. 418). Hence, Knowles agreed that flexibility is essential to adult learning.

Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012) placed the learner as the focus of process. “Different learners require different instructional strategies based on their individual differences” (p. 203). To be effective, adult educators must understand the differences between individuals and modify the learning experience to the learner. Adults perceive the relevance of education in relation to their personal circumstances and the extent to which the knowledge will benefit their situation.

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines support customization of curriculum to the individuals, thereby removing learning barriers (Hall, Meyer, & Rose, 2012). According to Sousa (2011), “no one teaching method exists that is best for all students all the
Regardless of the method, students must have positive feelings about their learning environment to make the learning experience successful.

Oliva and Gordon (2013) believed “curriculum planners must deal first with perceptions of relevance before they can deal with the question of relevance itself” (p. 331). According to Burian et al. (2012), the responsibility of the academic institution is to provide relevant programs that are meaningful to the student. Instructors should mentor students to assist in motivation and provide focus for learning. Zachary (2002) agreed with this premise.

For leaders in general, face-to-face communication is very important (Woolfe, 2002). Maxwell (1993) stated that “every person in this world is hungry for something, be it recognition, companionship, understanding, love- the list is endless” (p. 118). Individuals desire to have a meaningful life and to feel valuable. He described encouragement as “oxygen to the soul” (Maxwell, 1993, p. 119). The Apostle Paul urged the church of Thessalonica to “encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11, Tree of Life Version).

According to Holladay (2008), “Nothing is more important than relationships,” (p. 23). Holladay noted the following:

In the beginning, God created you for relationships. He made you to relate to him and to others. Miss out on relationships, and you’re missing the core reason for which God put you on this planet. And in the end, nothing is more important, because nothing will last longer than relationships. Your relationships with God and others will last all the way into eternity. (p. 26)

**Methods of Adult Education**

Research illustrates various types of methods within adult education, including traditional classroom, correspondence, distance education, and mentor relationships. Traditional education
stresses the importance of the educator where the student must adapt to the classroom environment and the curriculum (Knowles et al., 2012). Saba (2012) stated that the needs of adult learners must be the focus for the curriculum, not a “one-size-fits-all” type of solution.

Martin (2016) described the attendance of higher education as voluntary, and, for many attendees, “private debt is the only means of accessing post-secondary education” (p. 351). Due to the expense, higher education sources must create programs relevant to the investment. Institutions should not create courses or programs that are “just busy work” (Burian et al., 2012). Programs must take under consideration the schedules and demanding lives of the typical adult learners. The perceived benefits must outweigh the perceived costs.

Distance learning is an alternative to the classroom setting. McDowell Group (2001) described distance learning as a “subset of technology-based education” (p. 43), allowing the educator and the student to operate in different locations. Distance education can be presented in various forms such as “coursework delivered over the Internet, by audiographic means (computer graphics and telephone communications), and satellite television” (McDowell Group, 2001, p. 43).

Saba (2012) observed an increase in distance education programs, which are flexible and accessible to students. A disadvantage of distance education is the lack of student and teacher interaction and does not allow for adjustment of curriculum based on student needs or styles. Sullivan and Pagano (2012) discussed the Rural Alaska Native Adult Distance Education program from Alaska Pacific University (APU). The program provides educational opportunities to remote communities through a short-term residence portion of the course, followed by online assignments, allowing students to stay in their village environments.

Mentoring plays an important role in the education process and is considered a learning
relationship. “Teachers who prepare themselves as mentors increase their potential to enhance student growth and development, help students maximize education experiences, and enrich their own teaching experience and professional development” (Zachary, 2002, p. 27). Mentoring cannot be built successfully without both parties working together within the learning relationship. Conversation and communication are required for a positive mentoring relationship. Zachary (2002) referenced Knowles regarding the three-fold responsibility of the facilitator: to create an atmosphere “conducive to learning”; to allow learners to assist in educational planning; and to “encourage learners” to create and fulfill their own learning objectives (p. 28).

Students must have access to resources for learning to occur. Nanton (2016) discussed technology as a learning resource. “Technology can facilitate interaction and collaboration” (Nanton, 2016, p. 96). Nanton (2016) also stated that students need to be flexible and adapt to the learning environment, especially in the areas of integration and the use of technology within education programs. According to Siemens (2005), “Technology has reorganized how we live, how we communicate, and how we learn,” (p. 1). Informal learning through technology now surpasses formal education as the source for the majority of learning. Knowles et al. (2012) saw technology as an opportunity as well as a challenge. With technology, education is self-directed. Students learn as little or as much as is desired.

Adult educators must consider how to facilitate the inclusion of technology. Technology should be used as an enhancement for the curriculum but must not devalue the village culture. “As technology becomes more integrated as a necessity for daily life, access to technology will become as important as access to education,” (Page & Hill, 2008, p. 61). In rural areas, such as Alaska villages, issues of access to electronic devices and poor connectivity exist. According to
Reese (2018), 60,000 people in Alaska do not have any wired Internet providers available where they live. Zimmer (2018) from BroadbandNow, a data aggregation company, stated that most individuals in Alaska may access satellite Internet, but the problem is that service is “capped low” (meaning individuals could only use a certain amount of data each month similar to wireless plans), service is expensive compared to wired, and has long minimum contracts (two years) that make it unviable for many low-income individuals. McDowell Group (2001) commented regarding connectivity: “Despite the availability of Internet service, the quality of the connection remains a question as well as the quality and availability of computers in the schools” (p. 42). McDowell Group (2001) believed technology-based education (via CD, multimedia, or by accessing the Internet) could assist the learning process of the students by allowing them to become “more active and effective learners,” through the selection process required by the learners (p. 42).

Tomlinson (2000) believed instruction should be differentiated, which is student-focused and builds trust with the student. “This kind of trust creates a partnership of striving for excellence” (Tomlinson, 2000, p. 28). Differentiation uses student interests and potential to meet learning goals instead of focusing on test norms. Learning in the differentiated environment supports and encourages the student, building self-confidence. According to Saba (2012), if educational institutions would respond and develop programs based on the student, cost of education would decrease and relevancy of the material for the learner would increase.

Page and Hill (2008) described the context for rural Alaskan communities as different from rural communities in the contiguous United States. Many of the villages or bush hubs are only accessible by air; they are not accessible by road systems or trains. When rivers freeze in the winter, they become highways for snow machines and dog sled teams. Remote villages are
primarily inhabited by Alaskan Natives, many of whom still speak their native tongue. Subsistence living through hunting and fishing is important to the Native lifestyle; many individuals struggle to maintain their culture and values. In some remote areas, mail and other freight deliveries only arrive weekly. Many rural areas of Alaska are not afforded the same comforts available in urban areas, such as cell phones and Internet access. Bandwidth and cellular phone services are often limited in remote areas. “So-called nationwide cell phone services do not work in most of the villages off the road system, and the new XM and SIRIUS satellite radio services are not available in Alaska” (Page & Hill, 2008, p. 62). Struggles exist in the villages for proper equipment, access, and content relevance when using technology while still preserving cultural identity. Adult educators are challenged to effectively use available technology without diminishing cultures.

**Culturally Responsive Education**

Fienup-Riordan (2012) defined culture as “the system of symbols and meanings around which people organize their lives and interpret their experiences...Culture is not a thing but a view of the world that guides people’s actions” (p. 10). Cultural identity includes tangible items such as “language, food, clothing, arts, and physical traits,” and intangibles such as “attitudes, conceptions of time and oneself, and ways of communicating” (Fienup-Riordan, 2012, p. 21). Cultural identity varies among the 227 federally recognized Alaska Native/Indian tribes living in Alaska today (Native American Tribes and Languages of Alaska, 2017, p. 2).

According to Bersch and Lund (2002), respect for and appreciation of nature are “deeply held values” (p. 74) of indigenous individuals such as Alaska Natives. To encourage learning, an atmosphere of comfort and trust within a natural setting must be provided that is sensitive to the cultural context. According to the McDowell Group (2001), a cooperative learning environment
was the preferred setting for American Indian and Alaska Native learners. The McDowell Group discovered the following:

When used appropriately, information about learning styles of different ethnic groups can help educators better address the needs of their students, both in schools that serve predominantly one tribal group and also in urban schools whose students come from different tribes. It can provide insight into students’ thinking processes and how they choose to demonstrate knowledge and engage in learning in a group setting. (p. 35)

Due to differences in culture and learning styles, a “one size fits all” or cookie cutter approach to teaching is incompatible with learning needs of Native students. An academic expert with the McDowell Group study (2001) conveyed that adapting the curriculum to suit the needs of the students will allow Native students to succeed. Communication can also be a challenge for both the student and the teacher. One difference in communications skills between Alaska Natives and non-Natives is language development. One former teacher within the McDowell study stated, “Many times teachers that go into the village are saying the kids don’t understand them. The kids pause, think, and process, and it is very difficult for them to speak smoothly. This is a cultural difference” (p. 79).

Many native people have a poor image of themselves and their people (Smith, 1997). Many factors contributed to the native mentality, such as government-run and church-run boarding schools, and disintegration of traditional culture. A challenge for leaders is to move from cultural comfort zones to appreciate other cultures and learn from one another. Understanding context and culture are important leadership principles. Maxwell (2007) discusses the Law of Connection, which includes the connection guideline “Go to where they are” (p. 118). He notes that leaders should try to be more receptive to the culture, education, and
background of other individuals. “I adapt to others; I don’t expect them to adapt to me” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 118). Ingle (2017) also believed understanding context (people, resources, and circumstances) was important to leadership success. “You can’t lead effectively without a thorough understanding of the context” (Ingle, 2017, p. 19). Leaders must overcome the challenges and limitations context and culture may cause.

Learners and educators must have a reciprocal understanding of the culture of the other participants. According to Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005):

Native people may need to understand Western society, but not at the expense of what they already know and the way they have come to know it. Non-Native people, too, need to recognize the coexistence of multiple worldviews and knowledge systems, and find ways to understand and relate to the world in its multiple dimensions and varied perspectives. (p. 9)

Barnett (2016) believed curriculum should promote the purposes and values of the represented culture.

Keys to successful teaching within the rural Alaskan context are flexibility and relationship through community involvement. Skelton (2004) included the importance of willingness for schedule variability to flexibility. Developing relationships and trust within a village community is accomplished through village life participation (Price, 2003). Educators must learn about and become involved in the community. Involvement aids educators in the quest to understand the worldview of their students. The importance of culture and tradition are unavoidable in the Native classroom if the educator desires the curriculum to be relevant. Price (2003) asked a valuable question applicable to all educators: “How can we best respect students’ culture and make accommodations for cultural differences while at the same time encouraging
students to grow and learn in ways that empower them to interact on equal footing with dominant culture groups?” (p. 46). Adaptability, creativity, flexibility, and tenacity are required attributes within the Native people (Bates & Oleksa, 2008), requiring educators to adapt as well.

Educators cannot be ethnocentric, forcing students to conform to dominant cultural ideas. Pai and Adler (2001) defined ethnocentrism as the belief in the superiority of one’s own culture. Elmer (2006) compared ethnocentrism and egocentrism. Ethnocentrism is a belief that “their own cultural values and traditions are superior to those of other cultures” (Elmer, 2006, p. 68). Ethnocentrism includes “cultural arrogance” where “our ways are superior to yours” and egocentrism is “my ways are superior to yours” (Elmer, 2006, p. 131). In either instance, an atmosphere of superiority obstructs the educational exchange.

According to Bates and Oleksa (2008), education “refers to anything learned or taught that is useful, meaningful or relevant to the lives of others” (p. 82). In all cultures, the ultimate purpose of an education is to ensure that each new generation is capable of surviving and contributing to society (Roderick, 2010). He stated:

The goal of all education among Alaska’s indigenous population has been to educate the next generation to know what it means to be a human being, to accept the human place in the cosmic scheme of things, and to think, speak, and act as ‘real people’ should.

(Roderick, 2010, p. 82)

To motivate learning for Native students, the material must be relevant and correspond to their language proficiency, and a connection must be made with the teacher that is both positive and personal.

Native students experience “cultural confusion” (Breckenridge, 1995, p. 135) when practices within their school environment differ from their own cultural values. Relationship
with others is of ultimate importance in the Native American culture when making decisions. Conformity and cooperation are of more value than competition; the well-being of the group takes priority over personal inclinations.

Educators should be mindful of cultural practices and create religious education which empowers Native Christians to function effectively as Christians within their communities.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) stated:

What First Nations people are seeking is not a lesser education, and not even an equal education, but rather a better education—an education that respects them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise responsibility over their own lives. (p. 108)

Elmer (2006) described relationship as a method of service to others. He also believed that learning is most effective when it occurs in an equal partnership-type relationship. This relationship must foster trust if confidence is to be built, allowing both parties to “believe the other will not intentionally hurt them but will act in their best interest” (Elmer, 2006, p. 77). Students need to feel empowered, which is accomplished through a respectful relationship built through service and providing ministry ownership.

McEachern (2016) stated that life experiences, social conditions, and cultural values influence the formation of an adult student’s educational environment. “It is not hard to imagine the shock young people experienced when they left rural Alaska, their families, cultural worldview, language, and geography—only to arrive in what was essentially a foreign country” (McEachern, 2016, p. 90). For individuals who left the village for school, incongruencies of culture can cause difficulties. “School imparted western values of self-sufficiency and
independence, while the village operates along different lines, where mutual support, sharing and interdependence are paramount” (Bates & Oleksa, 2008, p. 61).

Incongruencies and accessibility of higher education for Indigenous students were also affected by the performance of K-12 schools and the lack of culturally supporting curriculum, distance from tribal communities, and lack of finances due to low socioeconomic status (Lopez, 2017). Simi (2015) conducted a study which examined Native American college students and what influenced success or failure in higher education. Relationship with professors was correlated with Native student success at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Lack of finances and support for Native American traditions and culture were considered detrimental to academic achievement.

The ASHE higher education report (2012) also noted factors of education success such as cultural responsiveness and opportunities available within the Indigenous community. “The notions of competition and individual success are often at odds with the reasons many Indigenous students pursue postsecondary education in the first place—to serve their families and communities better” (ASHE, 2012, p. 2). The report also presented barriers to higher education in concert with previously mentioned studies. “Community poverty, unemployment, and the accompanying lack of social services present substantial barriers to higher education” (ASHE, 2012, p. 40). A family’s ability to fund the education endeavor significantly impacts persistence in higher education. ASHE (2012) discovered the following:

Barriers to higher education severely limit American Indian/Alaska Native students’ choices for career pathways and opportunities for higher-paying jobs, while at the same time depriving Native nations of the important contributions—from the sustained sovereignty to self-determination to social and economic development—that a college-
Another significant barrier to education is the cultural difference between life at the university and the student’s home reservation or village.

Brayboy, Solyom, and Castagno (2015) noted the cultural differences occur not only in campus environment but within the curriculum, teaching practices, and extracurricular opportunities. Curriculum and coursework must be relevant not only to the student but to the Native community as well. The authors concluded that within Native American higher education, the underrepresentation of students and faculty are tied to a lack of financial support, insufficient role models, cultural dissimilarities between the way a student engages with the world and the curriculum, unreceptive educational institutions, and lack of academic preparation.

A study conducted by Guillory (2009) examined persistence of Native students in higher education programs. One critical factor to student persistence was social support provided on campus, such as in Native American or Multicultural Student Centers, providing students with a sense of community. Social support offset the negative effects of homesickness and feelings of isolation. He concluded, “From a community connection standpoint, university programs which directly connect AI/AN students to their native communities could prove successful for both recruitment and retention purposes” (Guillory, 2009, p. 18). As previously noted, he also observed financial issues as a barrier to higher education, but adequate funding was not a principal factor of persistence. Self-confidence was a prominent factor for Native student persistence. Confidence can be built by institutions providing academic assistance using cultural connections.

Alaska Pacific University created an educational program designed to provide relevant, professionally-oriented educational opportunities in rural Alaskan communities (Sullivan &
Pagano, 2012). The mission of the program was “training leaders from Alaska in Alaska” (Sullivan & Pagano, 2012, p. 23). The program was relevant to the professional needs of rural students utilizing flexible methods such as online systems, which allowed rural adult learners to continue living and working in the home community while earning a professional degree, reversing the need to recruit professionals outside the community. In addition to online courses, a face-to-face residency is held at the beginning of each term to assist students in building relationships with both professors and other students, receive technology training, and build a sense of community with the institution. The program provided support to students in a timely, consistent, and accessible manner.

Tippeconnic and Tippeconnic Fox (2012) discussed the issues associated with the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives, which include tribal languages, cultures, and identities, as well as economic and social factors. Formal education plays a role in the delivery of education that is culturally relevant to tribal communities and students. Cultures, languages, histories, and Native values must be included in all levels of education. Tippeconnic and Tippeconnic Fox (2012) concluded:

Values are embedded in the approaches to teaching and learning, including within institutional vision and mission statements. Education has been and continues to be a powerful tool to change individuals from who they are to what others want them to be. (p. 842)

Saggio and Rendon (2004) conducted a study to examine persistence of Native students at a Bible college. Data showed about 47% of Native students persist to complete their freshman year. The investigators discovered family, spirituality, and validation as the “most important influences on student persistence” (Saggio & Rendon, 2004, p. 223). Validation was seen in two
aspects: academic and interpersonal. Academic validation occurs in the academic context when faculty, staff, family members, and peers, provide feedback and encouragement to the students in an active way, reminding the students they are capable of learning and are important to the institution and learning process. Interpersonal validation occurs when encouragement and assistance is provided to students to enhance personal and identity development, social growth, and support with life issues. Respondents within the study were appreciative of those who accepted and welcomed them regardless of their background.

**Ministerial Education**

In the Indigenous Church model, Hodges (1953) believed that education should be individualized to meet the needs of the individuals in training. Hodges described issues that are still seen today regarding education for mature adults. “Young men can leave their homes for extended periods of time to receive Bible training, while the older men are tied down with family and business obligations” (Hodges, 1953, p. 54). Due to the importance of accessibility, access should be considered a priority above the convenience of the missionary.

Hodges (1953) believed education programs should also be decentralized, educating individuals in the church and village context and adapting for the native church’s development. One advantage to the decentralized program is the portability of the school, enabling educators to carry the programs to the students or education hubs as opposed to students coming to the central location. He believed educational programs would be more effective if education programs are kept in proximity to the source of the workers.

Every Christian has a special place in ministry. Brock (1981) believed every person to whom another Christian ministers is a potential minister. He described a reciprocal relationship of the “ministry of ministering to ministers” (Brock, 1981, p. 20). For ministry to occur,
ministers must be out among the people, building personal relationships, and understanding the local culture. Encouragement is important and can often be given through fellowship of churches. Of equal importance is an awareness of who people are, where they are located, and the religious needs of the individuals.

Sanders (2007) described the ministerial educational process modeled by Jesus. He educated His disciples for their future roles through His example and lessons. His teaching was completed while walking “on the road,” not by taking notes in a classroom setting. Jesus taught moral principles and values as they occurred in daily life. The goal of the leader is to discover the best in people. “True greatness, true leadership, is found in giving yourself in service to others, not in coaxing or inducing others to serve you” (Sanders, 2007, p. 13). Bailey (2018) agreed with Sanders when he said, “Jesus knew the best way to get to know someone was to be with them where they lived” (Bailey, 2018, p. 81). Relational leaders value the eternal significance of relationships and encourage followers. Encouragement is not simply praise but a method to help others to grow. The Apostle Paul instructed the Thessalonians to encourage each another and build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

“The primary goal of spiritual leadership is not excellence, in the sense of doing things perfectly. Rather, it is taking people from where they are to where God wants them to be” (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2001, p. 146). Leadership should not be about occupational positions; instead, it should be about relationships with God and other people. Leadership involves working with individuals, thus relationships with those in close proximity should develop. Great leaders value and invest in their people. Value and investment includes demonstrating concern for those they lead, showing the followers that they care.
Spiritual leadership also involves empowerment. God empowers believers to, in turn, empower others (Campbell, 2013). Leaders can empower others by aiding those under the leader’s influence to discover their God-given strengths and talents. Educating through empowerment is accomplished using the “relational coaching approach” (Campbell, 2013, p. 30). The goal of this style of education enables the learner to become an empowered teacher who can then empower others. Essential to the empowerment process is relationship. “Our personal presence in the lives of those we are seeking to empower is critical if the process is to be successful” (Campbell, 2013, p. 34). Leaders must be willing and able to spend time with the learners, recognize them publicly, cover them in prayer, encourage, and support them. Campbell (2013) noted the following:

Only as the disciples walked with Christ could they begin to get a sense of His heart and vision. Only as they watched His example could the future leaders of the church realize the necessity of having the same power as Jesus possessed. (pp. 30-31)

Leaders should develop an adult learning mentality to educate and empower individuals in the local church, facilitating a broader participation in indigenous leadership education. Indigenous leadership development is achieved within an environment of mentoring or coaching. One-on-one mentoring relationships are suitably matched for development of individuals and appropriate for accommodating cultures that value relationships.

Smith (2015) believed leaders are disappearing. “Ministry education models are unsustainable—students entering ministry education often have little hope of paid or full-time ministry work to pay back those loans” (Smith, 2015, p. 1). Denominations must discover creative and financially feasible ways to educate potential clergy. Smith (2015) declared
developing leaders do not fit into current leadership models. Leaders are needed who can facilitate cooperation within relational networks in the digital age.

Joynt and Dreyer (2013) agreed with the premise of disappearing leaders. They discussed several possible reasons behind the shortage of clergy, especially within the Roman Catholic Church. The authors believed a lack of encouragement for the clergy is one factor leading to the shortage. Another possible factor is the lack of adequate education for handling conflict situations, difficult personalities, or communication problems. Within the African context, the authors called for clergy to receive practical training to address local congregational needs. Education should include both practical tools to prevent burnout and a spiritual formation aspect.

For churches to thrive within the Native culture, Smith (1997) believed ministry must be motivated by viewing the potential of the workers and entrusting leadership responsibilities to individuals within the Native people. “We must see that our responsibility includes being culturally sensitive to other cultures and be involved in extending our ministries outside of our own cultural comfort zones, too” (Smith, 1997, p. 94). Everyone needs to actively participate in fulfilling the Great Commission. Of note, Smith did not agree with the Indigenous church model, saying the ideas of “self” limited the church to just the cultural or racial group instead of being all-inclusive.

Cultures differ throughout the world; thus ministerial contextual work is important before sharing the Gospel. Before implementing Western cultural methods of ministry, Barnett (2016) believed “significant and substantive” (p. 135) assessment should be made to adjust the ministry methods to fit the Native ministry construct. “Development of indigenous models for ministry can help to directly meet cultural needs, work more easily within the context, and face issues
such as the historically created negativity against Christianity” (Barnett, 2016, p. 136).

In a study of Apostolic field methods with Hopi and Navajo, Peiffer (2005) “confirmed the value and validity of developing indigenous methods in training upcoming native leaders for Christian ministry” (p. iv). Current academic structures and approaches neglect cultural relevance, overlooking the different ways of learning for Native people. Lack of adaptation is also prevalent in ministerial education for Native learners. The relational apostolic method studied by Peiffer (2005) focused on multiple leaders through the empowerment approach instead of a formal classroom environment. He believed Native Americans should be educated using an empowerment approach with a native philosophy. Raising strong native leaders should be the prevailing mindset. Facilitators must create partnering relationships that build trust among the learners. One factor within the relationship is how the facilitators view the native people. Facilitators must see the native people as a mission force and not a mission field. Individuals should be empowered to share the Gospel and reach other individuals within their people group, enabling them to take responsibility for their fellow natives and not depending on outside missionaries. Communication was a primary consideration within the empowerment process. “Developing ‘homegrown’ leadership is an essential key in this process, and the methodology of training and empowerment is vital to the success of indigenous leadership multiplication” (Peiffer, 2005, p. 16). Inspiring, cross-cultural leaders are needed to raise “homegrown” leaders within the small native communities and churches and demonstrate authentic spiritual leadership. The effectiveness of the program is revealed when indigenous leaders are reproduced.

The Apostolic method involved a mentoring relationship where followers are taught through life situations. Leaders must endeavor to meet the needs of the follower, attempting to discover the methods by which the follower learns. “Missionaries must strive to identify and
empower the natural leaders they have in their newly formed congregations and study the existing approaches of training and preparing leaders in the host society” (Peiffer, 2005, p. 44). Mentorship and empowerment of the homegrown leaders must ultimately be Spirit led and have a biblical foundation. The spiritual foundation will allow the new leader to “incarnate and exhibit a realm of truth and values transcending their own culture” (Peiffer, 2005, p. 49). Empowerment also includes an aspect of building confidence and self-esteem in the mentee. The mentoring process allows for practical assignments which encourages student discovery and education in the reliance on the Holy Spirit and to step out in boldness. “Our students grew in confidence through this combined form of training and gained an increased sensitivity in operating in the dependence, power, and authority of the Holy Spirit” (Peiffer, 2005, p. 182). Benefits of the Apostolic method are flexibility and social learning aspects, allowing the model to be adjusted to the situation, community, and context of the learner.

Chapman (2008) examined the historical background of the Bible school movement as it pertained to Pentecostalism. Bible schools were created to educate missionaries in practical theology and ministry instead of liberal arts. The classrooms and chapels of Pentecostal Bible schools focused not only on teaching but discipling and mentoring. Formal institutions were not the only locations for ministerial education. Schools of Ministry emerged from various districts, allowing an individual to attain ministerial credentials within one year. Chapman (2008) noted the following:

This training seeks to integrate spiritual formation, relational learning, and academic achievement and provide a unique learning experience. Students will not only meet the educational requirements for obtaining ministerial credentials but are encouraged to develop the character and skill essential for effective ministry. (p. 53)
Non-formal programs, such as District Schools of Ministry or Master’s Commission, provide beneficial Bible classes which focus on spiritual formation, practical ministry, evangelism, and outreach. Chapman (2008) believed students within these types of programs would “report a heighten sense of spirituality, intimacy with God and closer affinity to the mission of the church” (p. 53).

Carter (2014) authored a historical account of the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary. Leaders created the school to provide a formal education program to prepare pastors and church leaders. As with the Indigenous models, the priority was educating national church leaders to adequately understand the Word of God for effective evangelism and church planting. A strong focus was placed on the experience of practical ministry.

Technology can be useful in theological education. Oliver (2014) discussed several options to enhance quality and impact of ministerial education. Technology allows independent learning opportunities to occur at any time in any place, erasing barriers such as time constraints and geographic distances. Using technology for ministerial education could impact society as well. “Theological education could play a leadership role by equipping change agents that can bring positive change in society” (Oliver, 2014, p. 2). Technology also provides a method of teaching and learning that combines faith and tradition yet provides a locale for enduring interaction and development. Oliver (2014) reminded readers that technology-based education will not work for everyone. Educators must be flexible in the tools utilized. Some tools are more suitable for classroom-based education and theoretical knowledge. Other tools are effective in practical training or improving communication and allow for collaborative learning. Another benefit of technology-based education is the travel factor. Students are no longer required to travel to distant educational facilities regularly.
In Myanmar, Sann Oo (2014) believed in addition to the dependence on the leading of the Holy Spirit, providing formal ministerial education was essential for effectiveness in missions and to maintaining unity within the Pentecostal faith. Proper education aids the prospective ministers to be observant of false teachers, guiding fellow believers with sound doctrine. The purpose of theological schools in Myanmar has been to expand student knowledge of the Bible as well as to heighten the sensitivity of the students to the work of the Holy Spirit, allowing students to be successful in ministry. For the survival and growth of the church, providing theological education to the ministers is important. Theological education is not for potential ministers only; laity within the church need a secure biblical foundation as well. Most Pentecostal Bible colleges and seminaries began as short-term Bible schools, upgraded to two or three-year diploma institutions, and grew to become Bible colleges. Bible schools in Myanmar focused on Pentecostal doctrinal and ministerial education and maintained a strong relationship with the local churches. “The activities of the schools and the ministries of their graduates have a great impact on the growth and the ministries of the local churches” (Sann Oo, 2014, p. 203).

Context and culture were important in Myanmar as well. One school located in Myanmar began with International Correspondence Institute (ICI) curriculum and materials. After a few years, the school revised its program to include courses created by the school with relevance to the Myanmar context. Since students have limited use of the English language, the author suggested ministers with theological education should create or translate textbooks to fully equip future leaders.

Mwangi and de Klerk (2011) analyzed the connection between theological education and practical ministry while attempting to address the underlying problems hindering educational relevance. Theological education is a valuable tool to cultivate leaders who cultivate and
empower others to become leaders for building the church. The authors believed a relationship existed between theological education and practical ministry in that enhanced theological education improved practical ministry. Theological Education by Extension (TEE) was discussed as a decentralized theological education based within the field as to not disrupt student’s relationship within society, providing independent and systematic education with the addition of localized seminars within the student’s context. One weakness of the conventional ministry education method was identified as overemphasizing academics as opposed to the spiritual and practical facets of ministerial education. TEE included independent study and collaborative seminars allowing instructors and students to cooperate in the education process. “Students training for ministry should spend more time actually doing ministry than merely studying about ministry” (Mwangi & de Klerk, 2011, p. 125). Another asset of this program is the interpersonal relationship built between the student and the educator, who functions as facilitator and guide. Flexibility in content based on needs of the student and current church issues is a further asset of the program. The authors proposed reforms for theological education in Africa in line with TEE. One proposal advocates for flexibility in delivery models such as independent study, mentorship, discussion groups, modular courses in addition to lectures in the classroom environment and textbooks. Regardless of the educational delivery model, the focus of education must be the development of the total person. When integrating the curriculum, contextualization is an important factor. The curriculum should blend biblically centered academics, spirituality and practicality, while considering how sensitive this information is to the culture and specific society represented. Faculty must foster a relationship that demonstrates true concern for the student, their calling, and their ministry. The relationship must be like that of a friend, a mentor, and a partner.
Manso (2013) examined theological education in Ghana. Bible colleges have been established in Ghana to educate local church workers for ministry to their people. Unfortunately, students from churches with inadequate financial resources find it difficult to pay educational fees. Despite the financial issues, the common curricula and contextualized education provided by the Bible colleges in Ghana has established unity among ministers. The author believed the indigenous church concept of self-propagation, self-support, and self-government does not work effectively in the Ghanian context. The concept raised more challenges due to the communal nature of the Ghanian culture versus the Western nature of individualism.

Sun (2000) discussed education in the Pentecostal movement. Early Pentecostals believed formal theological education should be avoided since it could possibly restrain the Spirit-filled life. Early leaders felt local workers were the key to evangelization and the development of the indigenous church principles of self-support, self-government, and self-propagation of the national church. Thus, theological education has been at the core of the strategy for Assemblies of God foreign missions. Most of the facilities offered three or four-year programs with courses lasting four, six, or eight months in length. A third category included short-term theological institutions. The short-term programs were typically conducted in villages or local churches for short periods of time. Although the programs operated with inadequate budgets, they continued to provide education for individuals preparing to be pastors or evangelists as well as the church laity. The theological institutions organized assignments with practical ministry opportunities for students.

Sun (2000) also discussed the effect technology has had on education. Tools, such as computers, multimedia, and other tools for teaching have enhanced education. Impacts on education are being made through online courses, interactive learning, and global educational
institutions, which the author supposed would increase in the future. The author also believed churches and theological institutions should partner in recruiting, educating and dispatching workers to guide the church and preach the gospel to all nations, not just the local church. Collaboration results in creativity and new shared understandings as well as produces creative ideas to develop projects and programs that never before existed. Participation also strengthens support, encouragement, communication, and cooperation.

One challenge to ministerial education in Asia was older individuals responding to the call of God as their second career (Sun, 2000). Relocation of their family to a residential campus was not an option. This challenge could possibly be met by the use of modern technology. Theological institutions have recognized the challenge and generated more creative and flexible degree programs, including the delivery systems. Theological institutions within the Assemblies of God have been effective in the employment of their programs using creative methods of education: “The theological institutions, the apprentice-type training, training by correspondence, and mobile leadership training” (Sun, 2000, p. 246). More opportunities for theological education are moving from one delivery location, even though the author believed distance education would not replace residential campuses. Institutions must make sure their distance education programs align with their mission statement to ensure continued success in the future.

An effective method for leadership development is through mentorship, which is a necessary element to leader success (Hemby, 2007). The author conducted a study of trainees in internships preparing for various leadership roles within the “church-related contexts.” The study discovered the importance of mentoring in the ministerial leadership training context and the potential for enhanced leadership credibility. Mentoring provided both personal and professional development benefits. Even at a distance, the author believed effective mentoring
practices could have a great influence in the individual’s training. Results showed trainees were not interested in “shallow, superficial instruction” (p. 125) without challenges. They desired interactions offering “straightforward principles with real-life relevance and application” (Hemby, 2007, p. 126). An effective mentoring exercise discovered was the allowance of meaningful interaction and questions both in group and private forums. The availability of leaders dispensing assignments to provide feedback was important to students. “Effective mentors must be willing to set apart ample times and to find creative ways in which to informally interact with trainees” (Hemby, 2007, p. 133). Effective mentors must provide necessary resources when empowering followers to accomplish given tasks, including various types of encouragement. For mentorship effectiveness, students required leaders who related to their students, were available, and encouraged the students to succeed.

Ministry Education in Alaska

Early Moravian leaders in Alaska approached the propagation of clergy by educating Natives for ministry (Fienup-Riordan, 2012). In the 1960s, the Assemblies of God in Alaska visualized a similar concept. In 1963, Dr. Arvin Glandon began traveling to various Alaska Native villages teaching various Bible courses. Named Far North Bible School, the program was created from a desire to make Bible education available for believers in the villages. Glandon believed a residential school would be too expensive for potential ministers and would not be an option for those individuals who held positions of leadership within their villages. The program would provide education not only for potential ministers but Bible education for the church at large. His educational circuit ended in 1974 due to airfare prices and the draw of students to the Bethel Bible Training Institute. (Aiken, 2017)

In 1974, Ken Andrus established Bethel Bible Training Institute. The school’s purpose
was to prepare indigenous Alaskans for ministry. The school moved to Anchorage in 1980, believing the school would be accessible to more students and serve the entire Native population. This new school was named Far North Bible College (Aiken, 2017). Unfortunately, Far North Bible College closed its doors in 2008, leaving Alaska without an Assemblies of God residential education program.

The Village Bible Training Circuit began in 1993, reinstating the field training model from Glandon’s Far North Bible School, which continued until 2008. The field training model was reestablished with the creation of the Alaska School of Ministry (AKSOM) in 2009 (Aiken, 2017).

The mission and goal of AKSOM were shared in the 2009 Alaska District Council agenda:

The mission of AKSOM is to help the Alaska District of the Assemblies of God develop and empower home-grown leaders for Alaska ministry. AKSOM exists for the purpose of providing biblical, theological, and practical education in order to equip men and women in Alaska for Pentecostal leadership in the church and in the world. (p. E-1).

AKSOM is committed to ministerial and leadership education, not just to potential ministers but to the lay leaders of the Alaska District Council (now entitled the Alaska Ministry Network), without regard to where they are living in the Great Land. The goal is to provide educational venues across the state accessible to everyone at a reasonable cost and within a reasonable travel distance.

Due to the geographical and technological limitations within Alaska, special permission was received from ADSOM to live stream course venues. For individuals without internet access, classes could be recorded and administered by a proctor in the local church setting or an
AKSOM instructor would travel to the village (Aiken, 2017).

In his dissertation, Lindsay (2005) laid the foundation for a program such as AKSOM. He discovered Alaska natives “preferred the local church group study” (Lindsay, 2005, p. 122). Ministry educators within the denomination stressed the need for a mentored internship within the community context, preferring a rural village setting for pastoral preparation. They emphasized educating in a familiar environment where the student would feel comfortable. Other denominational educators suggested weeklong or two-week seminars within the local setting such as occurred through the Village Bible Training Circuit. Lindsay (2005) noted Alaska Natives require a location for pastoral education with minimal distractions. All agreed the educational setting must allow familiarity to encourage achievement and confidence while also providing community and emotional support. Some leaders interviewed believed a local, familiar setting was crucial to educational effectiveness while others believed dispatching students to Anchorage was the answer. Regardless of location, the setting must provide a sense of community, affirmation, and foster confidence and achievement.

For effective ministerial education to occur, mentoring must be a major component (Lindsay, 2005). If students will be ministering in Alaska, then education should be completed in Alaska, preferably by Alaskans, since Alaskan leaders understand the Alaskan context. Leaders realize a “one size fits all” approach to leadership development will not meet the educational needs of Native pastors and the rural Alaska perspective. “Organizational leaders must encourage and empower pastors and missionaries to develop methods of communicating the gospel suitable to village culture” (Lindsay, 2005, p. 149). Leaders within the Assemblies of God must prepare and equip Alaskan Natives for pastoral ministry to reach and mature their own people, making changes to accommodate educational methods as necessary. Lindsay (2005)
shared historical information regarding the founding leaders within the Alaska Assemblies of God and their understanding of the necessity of cultural sensitivity in educating ministers. Bethel Bible Training Center, the original residential school, was a three-month program which allowed for the seasonal nature of village living. Arvin Glandon continually asserted that the best venue for educating Native pastors was in their village context. B. P. Wilson, Alaska District Superintendent (1964-1974), agreed that education must be based in the community, with a primary goal of educating indigenous Alaska Natives for pastoral ministry.

Lindsay (2005) believed education must be multi-level, multi-national, flexible, and include non-residential components if the program was to succeed. Planning for distance education must be flexible, allowing for hunting, fishing, and whaling seasons. Education should be conducted in a “hub” village, allowing for other villages to converge into one for training to maximize attendance. Traveling instructors, such as missionaries, retired educators, visiting professors, district personnel, and local pastors, would be vital to program success. Instructors could mentor pastoral students during the day and teach evening classes to the entire village. Lindsay (2005) noted the following:

For the Assemblies of God to reach native Alaskans with the life-changing power of the gospel, they must find effective means of preparing Alaskans to reach Alaskans. This task will not succeed by forcing the gospel into a ‘white man’ package and thrusting it upon the native community. (p. 156)

Geographical, historical, and cultural differences among Alaska Native villages are huge challenges for ministry (Walker, 2016). In the interview, Burkhart, a missionary with Chi Alpha, stated “Alaska has more than 100 villages without a pastor or a gospel presence” (Walker, 2016, p. 2). Organizations, such as Chi Alpha, are educating students to return to their communities
after college to share the Gospel. The bivocational natives returning home can reach the small populace in their village, where sending a missionary or using traditional church-planting methods would otherwise be impractical.

Ministry education has been the subject of other dissertation work, each following the theme of taking the education to the students. Kellar (1985) designed a program for educating Athabaskan Christians to teach the Bible to their own people. The course combined periodic regional workshops, independent home study, and seminars within the student’s village. The program arrangements made education accessible to more Athabascans and allowed for reflection on learning and application to life situations. The village conferences and seminars also allowed for student interaction yet allowed individuals to receive education in the cultural environment while continuing usual family roles. The program helped students to grow both spiritually and personally. Students gained confidence, experience, Biblical knowledge, and skills enhancing their ability to exercise within their own ministry and within their own culture. The author related that few students attended residential educational program, which requires them to leave their villages for extended time periods and are extremely expensive. Key themes perceived within this study included terms such as local, practical, accessible, culturally sensitive, and flexible. The author also noted six particular indigenous learning principles: “individual pacing; extensive reinforcement; combination of audio and visual resources, not necessarily electronic; peer involvement in the learning process; opportunity for immediate use of learning in local situations related to personal needs and issues; and immediate feedback” (Kellar, 1985, p. 56).

According to Davis (2008), the theological extension model could be utilized to develop ministry leaders in the local cultural setting. The extension model employed an academic
program paired with a practical component. Students who complete both elements would fulfill educational requirements for ordination with the Assemblies of God. Davis suggested an extension program with American Indian College (AIC) to create “hub communities.” The premise of the hubs and AIC partnership would allow the program to contextualize instruction to fit the culture of the students. The proposed Alaska Theological Extension Education (AKTEE) program would be composed of curriculum developed by AIC, Global University, and instructors who have experience in intercultural education. As a college created specifically for Native students, AIC uses materials that are culturally relevant. Global University is a culturally sensitive program which has been used worldwide.

The objective of the study conducted by Davis (2008) was to develop leaders for ministry in the rural areas of Alaska. Davis (2008) indicated several advantages of theological extension education. One advantage is the delivery model can be more economically feasible than residential models. Another advantage is inclusiveness. Instead of students attending a residential program, taking the program to the students allows other individuals in the location the opportunity to attend. The third advantage is the curriculum includes basic Biblical education applicable to the cultural context.

Reiber (2008) authored a study to examine the importance of coaching, which is a valuable factor of leadership development. The author created an educational seminar to assist churches in building teamwork and purpose to determine if coaching supports church growth. The seminar was created to provide coaching to the entire leadership of the church and guide in determining the church’s value and vision. The five areas covered within the seminar included evangelism, worship, fellowship, ministry, and community. Reiber (2008) discovered the coaching process built healthier churches.
Campbell (2005) discussed the promotion of an empowering model for leadership development of Alaska Native leaders within their culture. Empowerment allows individuals to feel confident and use personal gifts and talents. The proposed model would “emphasize getting the church involved in the ministry of the people, equipping them to minister effectively to their world, and recognizing them as legitimate ministers of the church” (Campbell, 2005, p. 110). In Alaska, Indigenous leadership development requires a successful mentoring and coaching models. Empowerment is manifested when developing leaders are given the opportunity to observe the practice of ministry, to perform ministry in an environment that is safe and relational, and to be evaluated by a trusted mentor. Matching developing leaders to mentors can be a difficult task due to locality and distance constraints within the state.

Summary

A review of the literature outlined several factors for consideration of adult education programs. For programs to be successful, educators and curriculum developers must create programs relevant and flexible to the culture and context of the student. Educators will only understand student educational requirements by building relationships.

An examination of educational methodologies included a discussion of traditional, correspondence, distance education and mentorship opportunities. The importance and effect of culture in the application of educational methodologies, including the Alaska context, were discussed.

Ministerial education in overseas and the Alaska Native village context were examined. Studies concluded the importance of relationship in the educational activities, encouraging the establishment of a comfortable learning environment. Finally, an inquiry of the AKSOM program was conducted. The results concluded that the program was created as a culturally
responsive ministry education program using adult education principles and applying appropriate methodologies relevant to the Alaska context. Overall, the literature revealed characteristics such as accessibility, availability, cultural responsiveness, flexibility, empowerment, relevance, and relational as significant attributes for a positive learning process.
III. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore native village pastors’ perceptions of the Alaska School of Ministry (AKSOM). The experiences shared by pastors studying under AKSOM was the phenomenon analyzed. Other areas of consideration included the discovery of how AKSOM has assisted these pastors in the achievement of their calling in light of the remoteness of their villages, as well as any perceived effects the program may have had on their villages.

A phenomenological study approach was selected to understand the essence of AKSOM. Merriam (2009) described a phenomenological study as one that “seeks understanding about the essence and the underlying structure of the phenomenon” (p. 23).

Research Design

Five qualitative approaches exist in qualitative research: narrative study, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). Narrative studies “tell stories” of individuals and explore their life experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 67). These stories are first-person accounts of their life experiences (Merriam, 2009). A narrative study design was not utilized since the study examined only one experience.

Case studies provide an in-depth understanding of cases over time and utilize several information sources such as documents and observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The intent of this study was not an in-depth description or analysis of AKSOM, which rendered the case study
approach inappropriate.

Ethnographies describe and interpret the shared patterns of culture of a group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Merriam (2009) noted that the primary method of data collection for this type of study was “immersion in the site as a participant observer” (p. 28). Due to the cultural differences within the various tribal units as well as the high cost of travel to the villages, an ethnographic study within the cultural environment was not feasible.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), grounded theory uses the views of the participants to develop a theory and focuses on a process containing steps occurring over a period of time. The steps of a process were not examined in this study, thus grounded theory was not appropriate.

The phenomenological approach was used to understand the essence of the AKSOM experience from the perspective of the participant (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). As described by Leedy and Ormrod (2016), the study attempted “to understand people’s perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation,” as well as answer the question “What is it like to experience such-and-such?” (p. 255). Becker (1992) describes phenomenological researchers as wanting “to know more about what a phenomenon is rather than what causes it to exist…Unlike traditional researchers, they want to understand the nature of a phenomenon rather than to predict and control it,” (p. 33). This study focused on the perceptions of the individual ministers’ experiences with AKSOM to discover what the program means to them and their villages. Therefore, due to the focus on participant perceptions, phenomenology was the most appropriate approach.

**Participants**

The study sample was composed of 15 pastors. Ten participants were AKSOM students
who provided religious support in Alaska Native villages within four Alaska Native regions. Five ministers were leaders within the Alaska Ministry Network, three of which are current directors of AKSOM. The participant demographics included ten White participants, four Alaska Native participants, and one African-American participant; three participants were women.

Ministers invited to participate in the study were chosen based on their enrollment and completion of at least one AKSOM course. A list of possible participants was provided to the researcher by the AKSOM director. Students were sent an email and a written letter inviting them to participate in the study. For reasons unknown to the researcher, only two individuals responded to the invitations. Due to the lack of response, other participants were recruited through face-to-face contact and networking during the Alaska Ministry Network Conference. All 15 ministers agreed to participate and signed the consent outlined on the Interview Demographics sheets (Appendices A and B).

**Context of the Study**

Due to the infeasibility of travel and the remoteness of the villages, student interviews were conducted during the Alaska Ministry Network’s annual conference. The interviews employed structured and semi-structured questions developed by the researcher (see Appendix C for the student interview guide). As suggested by Becker (1992), the interviews were conducted in a private area conducive to participant comfort and free from interruptions. All participants were credentialed ministers within the Assemblies of God, provided ministry in a Native village context, and had attended AKSOM courses.

Participants were interviewed individually and privately with a few exceptions. Since the interviewer was female and out of respect for participant culture, two male pastors were
interviewed with their respective spouse in attendance. One spouse did not provide comments during the interview. The other spouse attended AKSOM courses in the past with her spouse and provided comments regarding her perceptions of the program.

One interview session involved three individuals from one ministry location. While the session took on several characteristics of a focus group, participants were not interviewed together for their “shared understanding” or for “group agreement” (Gay et al., 2012, p. 388). The method was used solely for the convenience of the participants. Individuals answered the interview questions and provided personal feedback. All responses were contained in one interview transcript but were separated by respondent during data analysis.

Interviews for the AKSOM and Alaska Ministry Network leaders were conducted using a separate interview guide which also included structured and semi-structured, open-ended questions. Two Alaska Ministry Network and AKSOM leaders were interviewed at the Network office. One AKSOM leader, who had relocated outside Alaska, was interviewed by telephone. The remaining two AKSOM leaders were interviewed at the researcher’s church. (See Appendix D for leader interview guide.)

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher began attending AKSOM courses in 2009 at the school’s inception. Through the encouragement of the staff, all courses within the three credentialing levels were completed. After completing all courses, the researcher volunteered as a producer for the monthly courses and as an instructor for two courses. In 2017, the researcher was invited to join the AKSOM team as an assistant director. The ministers who participated in the study have not been students of the researcher in the past nor are they projected to be in the future.

In accordance with Creswell and Poth (2018), the researcher was the key instrument in
the study by collecting data through conducting interviews. The researcher also attempted to follow the outlined qualities of a “Good” study by conducting an “ethical study” and employing “rigorous data collection procedures” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 48). The role of the researcher during the interview process was to observe, guide the questions, and, to the greatest extent possible, remain unbiased during the interview. The lack of bias was described by Moustakas (1994) as the “Epoche,” or to “set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things,” (p. 85). Epoche does not attempt to disregard the researcher’s reality, but denies the “natural attitude, the biases of everyday knowledge, as a basis for truth and reality” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). As a previous student as well as current assistant director, the researcher attempted to remain unbiased throughout the entire study to the best of her ability.

**Measures for Ethical Protection**

The study and its data collection methods were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Southeastern University. The ministers volunteered to participate in the study, without coercion or threat. By signing the consent form, participants were assured anonymity and confidentiality. Participant responses were divided into two categories: students and leaders. Members within the separate categories were assigned a number such as “P1” for “Participant 1” and “L1” for “Leader 1”. Any reference identifying a minister to a specific village was replaced with “XXX”.

The researcher was the only individual with access to the information. All handwritten documents were scanned to an electronic format and transferred to an external USB drive, dedicated to the research study. All other electronic data created during the study, including the audio and video files, were saved to the USB drive as well. The USB drive and the information contained therein will be securely maintained and destroyed after five years. After documents
and files were saved, all handwritten documents were destroyed to protect participant identity.

**Research Questions**

The primary research questions which guided this study were:

1. How do pastors in Alaska Native Villages perceive the Alaska School of Ministry?
2. What are the perceived effects of the Alaska School of Ministry on ministries and villages of these pastors?

**Data Collection**

In qualitative research, the primary method to investigate the experiences of others is through the interview process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2006). In the attempt to understand ministers’ perceptions and experiences with AKSOM, the interview process was used for data collection.

The interviews were conducted using open-ended, semi-structured interview guides as suggested by Merriam (2009), which allowed the interview to flow naturally. The guides, created by the investigator, also provided a written platform to annotate key responses and any potential follow-up questions which surfaced during the interview. Separate interview guides were utilized for student participants and leaders (Appendix C).

To validate the information provided by the participants, the interviews were recorded using separate audio and audio/video files to discover the patterns and themes relating to ministerial perceptions. A line-by-line discourse analysis was performed using the files. Subsequent to the initial transcription completion, the draft transcript was compared to the audio/video file a second time to confirm data accuracy.

To further validate research data, participants were provided a copy of the transcript as noted by Creswell and Poth (2018). Typographical errors annotated by interviewees were
incorporated into the final transcripts. Finally, as suggested by Seidman (2006), the transcripts were read “with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text” (p. 117).

**Procedures**

Student participants were invited to attend during the Alaska Ministry Network conference. I was introduced to the eligible students by two AKSOM leaders. During the introduction, I explained the purpose of the study and the process it would entail. Students who agreed to participate were provided with an interview appointment. When participants arrived, I greeted them at the door and thanked them in advance for their participation. When participants agreed to participate, the parameters of the study were explained and the demographic sheet was provided to the student. I explained the demographic sheet as well as the consent form contained thereon. Participants were asked to complete the demographic sheet and sign the consent. Once the consent form was completed, I began to record the encounters using a digital video camera. In case of technical difficulties, secondary audio files were recorded simultaneously on my laptop computer. Interviews were conducted utilizing the outlined interview guide.

Five leaders were invited to participate in the study. The leader, who moved outside of Alaska, was recruited by email and interviewed by telephone. Two leaders were interviewed in their offices at the Alaska Ministry Network while the remaining two leaders were interviewed at a church. Leaders were provided a leader demographic sheet and briefed regarding the consent form. The leader interviewed by phone was provided the consent and demographic sheet by email, which was signed and returned by email to the researcher.

Upon completion of each interview, the video and audio files were saved to protect from loss. The interviews were transcribed and sent to the participants for review. Typographical
errors within the transcripts were corrected as requested by participants. Transcripts were then transferred to the USB along with all audio and video files.

**Methods to Address Validity and Reliability**

Several validation strategies within qualitative research are suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). They advise the use of at least two strategies in a study. Three strategies were employed during this study, which included participant feedback, peer review, and triangulation. Participant feedback allows the participant to “judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261). Completed transcripts were emailed to participants requesting feedback and validation of the transcript data. Corrections to typographical errors were made as requested.

The peer review strategy was also used to “keeps the researcher honest” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263). Members of my dissertation committee provided feedback for the study.

According to Merriam (2009), triangulation includes interviewing people with different perspectives. This method was instrumental in the selection of AKSOM students and leaders as participants, comparing the perceptions of the students with the leaders’ perceptions and the underlying intent of AKSOM.

Merriam (2009) noted that reliability “refers to the extent to which researcher findings can be replicated (p. 220). To enhance reliability, the research data was acquired by employing “good-quality recording devices and by transcribing the digital files” as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 264).

**Data Analysis**

The method of analysis followed the Moustakas approach as described by Creswell and Poth (2018). To maintain fidelity within the study, the researcher attempted to refrain from
everyday perceptions and presuppositions, also known as bracketing or Epoche, in the analysis process. Interviews were transcribed in their entirety allowing all relevant data to be listed and grouped preliminarily in a process known as horizontalization. According to Moustakas (1994), horizontalization is an aspect of Phenomenological Reduction in which all statements are treated equally and have equal value (p. 97). As the data were analyzed, the interviewer treated all statements with equal weight and determined which statements were relevant to the research questions. Irrelevant statements, including those repeated, were deleted.

The researcher examined responses for pertinence to the research and labeled the responses with key words in the margin. Irrelevant, vague, and duplicate data were removed to narrow the “invariant constituents of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The process involved annotation of emerging themes, patterns, and perceptions during the interview transcription process as well as the review of key words noted on interview guides. The researcher duplicated the process for each of the research questions.

Related responses were “clustered” or bundled to constitute initial themes (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The ten initial themes discovered included support/encouragement, flexibility, approachable, mobility/portability, practical/useful, affordable, local, relational/fellowship, consistent, and builds confidence. The transcripts were printed and color-coded by hand.

Using the themes, Individual Textural Descriptions, or descriptions of the experiences using the text from each participant, were completed (Moustakas, 1994). An electronic spreadsheet was created to associate significant participant passages with the appropriate themes. To protect participant confidentiality, responses were numbered based on the type of respondent (student or leader) and identifiable information was replaced with “XXX”.
Responses and themes were reexamined to validate their suitability and relevance to the individual transcripts. During this step, the themes were narrowed and the electronic transcripts were color-coded in accordance with the overarching group themes. Relational, flexible, empowering, practical, and financially feasible emerged as the overarching themes. A description of terms is provided in Appendix E.

The number of times or passages associated with each code was not tallied during this study in agreement with Creswell and Poth (2018), who stated that “we do not report counts in articles” (p. 192). Counting of codes would constitute a quantitative study instead of qualitative study.

Summary

This chapter presented a detailed account of the methodology employed for the study and the justification for the phenomenological design. The context of the study and a description of the participants were included. The process of data collection and analysis were discussed as well as the steps for information protection and validation.
IV. RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the perceptions of pastors ministering in Alaska Native villages regarding the Alaska School of Ministry (AKSOM). The study consisted of 15 ministers, which included ten participants who were students of at least one AKSOM course and provided ministry in an Alaska Native village. The remaining five participants were leaders of the AKSOM program, including three current directors. After the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval for the study, the researcher conducted the interviews during the Alaska Ministry Network’s annual conference in Anchorage.

Methods of Data Collection

The primary method for data collection was interviews. Semi-structured, open-ended interview guides were used to steer the conversation. Interview guides were created by the researcher and used to document key words.

Interviews for AKSOM students were conducted during the Alaska Ministry Network annual conference. Interviews with AKSOM leaders were conducted either in their network offices or at King’s Way Ministry Center in Eagle River, Alaska. One leader, who had moved out of Alaska, was interviewed by telephone.

Interviews were recorded using separate audio and audio/video files. Independent files.
were created for each interview. Following each interview, video files were saved to a data card within the camera and a backup audio file was saved to the researcher’s laptop and password protected. All files were transferred to a USB drive reserved solely for study data. Interviews were transcribed to discover the patterns and themes relating to the perceptions of ministers. A line-by-line analysis of the transcripts was performed. Data was color-coded and categorized based on emergent themes. Analysis resulted in five themes which included: relationship, flexibility, empowerment, practical, and financial feasibility.

Findings

Ten AKSOM students and five AKSOM leaders were interviewed. Four students were Alaska Natives, and all ten students ministered in the Alaska Native context. Three leaders provided ministry courses in Alaska Native villages. Interview transcripts were created and examined to discover themes. Student participants were identified with the label Participant and assigned a number between one and ten that served as their name for the purposes of the study, i.e. Participant One. Leaders were identified similarly with the label Leader and were assigned numbers between one and five, i.e. Leader One. The following research questions were utilized to ascertain responses from the participants.

Research Question 1: How do pastors in Alaska Native Villages perceive the Alaska School of Ministry?

Participant responses were as follows:

Participant One was a pastor living in a native village. He completed AKSOM courses in his village through the assistance of traveling instructors. When asked to describe his perception of AKSOM, he commented, “I believe they are a really big support” and that “it is a good program.”
Participant Two was a pastor living in a native village. She completed AKSOM courses through DVD and visiting instructors. Her perception was that “I know that if I didn’t take AKSOM, I probably would still have been at the starting point. It really helped me to be positive about my ministry.”

Participant Three was a pastor who was not living in a native village but provided ministry in a nearby native village. He completed his courses both in person and by DVD. When asked of his perceptions of AKSOM, he answered, “I think it’s great…Educated me to or gave me a better education of the Word of God.”

Participant Four was a pastor who was not living in a native village but provided ministry in a native village. She completed courses through Internet simulcast and DVD. She stated, “The classes themselves, like I really enjoyed.” She felt the courses were “very enriching” and “definitely beneficial.”

Participant Five was a pastor living in a native village. She completed AKSOM courses through DVD. She stated, “I think AKSOM as a whole is an extremely great opportunity, especially if you are going into the mission field in Alaska because it really helps equip, teach you.” She also felt the program was enriching to her spiritual life saying that “You can also grow on a spiritual level and that knowledge level of who God is.”

Participant Six was a pastor living in a native village. He completed his courses in the classroom environment. Regarding the classroom environment, he said that, “I really enjoyed the courses…The different instructors that we had, they just did a phenomenal job with their courses and it was always really fun, enlightening time.”

Participant Seven was a pastor living in a native village. His interaction with AKSOM was through DVD courses. This pastor remarked regarding this method of interaction, “I think it
has a whole lot of potential.” He further stated that, “I think AKSOM enhances our spiritual lives.”

Participant Eight was a pastor living in a native village. His AKSOM classes were taught in the village by visiting pastors. He described AKSOM as being “quite beneficial” and provided “more understanding.” He felt this greater understanding included an “understanding of the Word” and how it could be applied.

Participant Nine was a pastor living in a native village. His interaction with AKSOM has also occurred through traveling instructors. He commented that, “I’m glad for AKSOM because it really teaches deep…we get to encourage each other in the faith.”

Participant Ten was a pastor who did not live in a native village but provided ministry to a village. He attended AKSOM by traveling to the educational venues and through Internet simulcast. He described AKSOM as “marvelous” and “like a God gift” to him.

Leaders who were asked the same question regarding their perceptions of AKSOM responded as follows:

Leader One taught various AKSOM courses through the simulcast venues as well as travelled into the villages to teach local classes. He perceived that “It’s a great program. It is safe to say it has blessed me as much as it has blessed the students. And I really believe it’s a tool that God has risen up across our land, especially in Alaska.”

Leader Two taught various AKSOM courses in the urban venues. His perception indicated that, “It takes the ministry to where the people are.” He went on to state, “I feel like it’s been very effective and will continue to be for as long as we can get the support and keep good instructors.”

Leader Three taught AKSOM courses through both the simulcast venues in urban areas
and has travelled to teach classes in various villages. He observed about the traveling courses that, “It is flexible in that it allows student to not be in a particular college…over a 17-week semester.” He further stated that, “It allowed them to prepare for the ministry.” Leader Three believed the program was “very effective.” He disclosed that of the number of individuals who have taken AKSOM course that apply for credentials within the Alaska Ministry Network is “between 85 and 88 percent. So, I would say that our program is effective.”

Leader Four taught AKSOM courses through urban simulcast as well as in local village venues. He stated that, “It was a blessing from God. I believe just a God moment for Alaska.”

Leader Five was also an AKSOM leader who said the offering of AKSOM courses “Gives them (the students) the opportunity to fulfill the credentialing responsibilities for the Assemblies of God.” His positive perception of AKSOM was apparent in his statements. He described AKSOM as “Pentecostal training, spirit-empowered and spirit led…And I think that’s very important for us in equipping and training leaders for the future.” He also felt that AKSOM “is the answer for training future Alaska Native leaders.” He went on to say, “I would want AKSOM to always be a training vehicle that is for everyone.”

**Research Question 2: What are the perceived effects of the Alaska School of Ministry on ministries and villages of these pastors?**

Participant One noted an impact on his church. He expressed that, “As a whole, it impacted those who would come to the church and come to church services…and further get fed and learn more about what’s in the Scripture and exactly what it means.”

Participant Two noted how AKSOM assisted in creating a positive perspective of her own ministry as well as interpersonal relations with the community members. She stated that “I’m able to approach them on a more positive way.”
Participant Three also perceived a positive effect on his ability to disseminate the Gospel message by allowing him to “minister in the Assemblies of God to the people.”

Participant Four described the interpersonal effects of AKSOM and how it “helped me with my view of how I approach ministry, how I approach people.”

Participant Five relayed how the program has prepared her for ministry to those in the village. “It’s really given me tools. It’s really equipped me.” Participant Six concurred with the idea of ministry preparation when he stated the courses within AKSOM gave him “more understanding of God’s Word and how to minister.” Participant Seven believed AKSOM prepared him spiritually for ministry saying that “It gets you thinking about ok what do we believe, why does the Bible say this, and what does it mean for me.”

Participant Eight conveyed the benefits of AKSOM on the local church members who also attended courses in the village venues. Participant Eight stated, “I believe it gave them a different viewpoint, outlook, to see through a different person a different prism. It opens your mind up, so I think the church benefitted from it.”

When Participant Nine was asked if there had been an impact because of AKSOM, the answer was “Yes we have.” The participant believed that as individuals interact in the workplaces, such as the clinic or the local schools, they share what they learned from AKSOM. Individuals attending AKSOM “can have a better knowledge of living for Christ and that they can relate that knowledge to them in the workplace.” He described how the courses built up faith and allowed individuals to be “models” in their village.

Participant Ten noted a practical impact of AKSOM on the church. He affirmed the practical impact by stating, “I’ve used some of my training and actual curriculum to preach from,” which allowed the training to be propagated.
From the leadership perspective, the effects seemed more apparent. Leader One described his interaction with village pastors. If pastors from the villages had questions, they would call and ask those questions because of a relationship that had been built through AKSOM. The leader believed “the value goes even beyond the courses themselves to the relationships that have been built.” He also felt the pastors were putting into practice the items they had learned in the classes. He continued with a description of the impact for the village by saying “It has been a tremendous value not just to the pastor but also for the congregation…They’ve opened it up to the entire congregation and the pastors are there viewing it as an opportunity for Christian discipleship and development.” The leader felt the program has helped create ministry leaders in the village when he said, “They didn’t know they were interested in ministry but after going through it gives a chance for that calling to germinate and develop.” The response from Leader Two agreed with Leader one in his belief that AKSOM was well received by people in the local community.

Leader Two also noted the impact through the propagation of pastors in the villages. The leader reported a lack of Native senior pastors when at one time in the past the Assemblies of God had several Native pastors. He stated that within two years of the launch of AKSOM, the Alaska Ministry Network was “already beginning to see Native pastors in there, both senior pastors and staff pastors.”

Leader Three believed AKSOM affected the villages as well. He thought the greatest impact of the course was with the pastors who were involved but by extension, congregations and people who were allowing themselves to be exposed to the education process. He noted one pastor in particular whose AKSOM attendance gave the pastor the ability to “more effectively minister socially to the people in the village as well as professionally as a pastor in the village.”
According to Leader Four, AKSOM extended beyond an educational process to cause revival. The leader stated that “It goes beyond a culture…cultural, social and very much an evangelistic opportunity as well.” The program aided in leadership development and created “home-grown” pastors. Leader Four saw individuals who never thought they could be leaders in either a religious or spiritual sense within their village. After AKSOM attendance, the individuals changed their self-concept to be able to say, “I can do this.”

Leader Five, an avid proponent of AKSOM, described the effects of the program and its importance in educating and equipping future leaders. He credited the school of ministry with educating and preparing village pastors for leadership within their communities. Because of AKSOM, the church was growing. He also stated that “for the communities to have their people in these spiritual leadership roles and not depending on the missionary or the white man from outside to come in and do that for them, they are empowered spiritually.” Due to the remote and isolated context of village life, Leader Five stated that AKSOM is the answer for educating future Alaskan and Alaska Native leaders.

Themes

Through the data analysis process, the responses provided by the participants were transcribed and color-coded to discover perceptions of respondents. Responses were initially grouped based on ten emerging themes. After further review, several themes were combined and narrowed. Five underlying themes were discovered during the study, which include relationship, flexibility, empowerment, practical, and financially feasible. Subcategories were noted within empowerment (confidence and support) and relationship (local, fellowship, approachable). The main themes are indicated in the following descriptions.
Relationship

Local. The theme of relationship contained three subcategories. The first subcategory was “local,” which participants denoted as an important familiarity based on location. Participant Three noted that “It’s local here in Alaska. Handled here…Alaska ministry for Alaskans.” Participant Four also felt the locality of AKSOM was important stating, “I didn’t have to call somewhere out of state.” She appreciated that the program was “based here in Alaska and it was in Anchorage.” Participant Five chose AKSOM because she believed she was called to Alaska. She wanted to stay in Alaska to receive her education because of her call to the people. She felt that “it’s almost like instead of going to Walmart you go to a home market where people are like, ‘Oh yeah I picked this fresh’. It’s like people from Alaska sowing into Alaska…this is ours, this is Alaska’s.”

Responses from the Leaders also noted the theme of a local relationship. Leader One stated “It fits like a hand in a glove to meet the need we have here.” Leader Three noted the local relationship for the course gatherings that “They come together for a class that meets on a Saturday.” Leader Four described locality as a benefit as well due to the obstacles experienced with correspondence programs outside of Alaska. One such “inhibiting factor in Alaska” was the “time lag” experienced through the postal process. The locality of AKSOM was expressed as a strength by Leader Five stating, “[I]t’s localized ministerial training in a local geography context.” He believed AKSOM would provide a viable option for professional individuals who are unable to leave their homes due to job commitments. He supposed that “it will continue to be an answer in training future Alaskan leaders.”

Fellowship. Participants communicated the importance of fellowship within the relationship theme. Participant Three attended several courses in person and desired “more
classes in the small areas.” One of the deciding factors for Participant Four when choosing AKSOM was that she “knew the people.” Participant Five was able to get to “know the hearts of the pastors and the different people picking the curriculums and who are formulating like you know this is our vision.” Participant Six valued the fellowship aspect of AKSOM as well and built strong relationships with the instructors by “watching how the teachers were.” The participant enjoyed the stories, personal experiences and analogies shared by the instructors that built rapport. Relationship was also a deciding factor for Participant Seven when he said, “(W)hat really drew me was that relationship.”

Participant Eight discussed his appreciation of the fellowship aspect. He preferred face-to-face instruction for the opportunity to “get to know your instructors.” Participant Nine described fellowship as a time to “have believers come together.” He enjoyed the fellowship before and after the lessons. He relayed that it was “nice to have our brothers and sisters to be at their level, to be at the class, to be at the same table.” He felt the fellowship experience also strengthened his faith and the faith of other believers. He stated, “(I)t really builds up faith; it involves people from different places, not just one place, to come together.”

Similarly, leaders described the advantages of fellowship for the student and the professor. In describing the local venue, Leader One noted the importance of the classroom experience by stating “You do have connections with the professor and you have interaction with other students.” Given that several instructors also held executive leadership positions within the Network, Leader One reasoned that AKSOM allowed the students the opportunity to become acquainted with Network leaders. He said, “(Y)ou can build relationships with other leaders in the Network…you have access to Presbyters who are teaching or other pastors, other missionaries, other ministers.” Leader One believed teaching several courses with AKSOM laid
the foundation for building connections with students stating “by the time someone shows up to the process for credentialing, I know that person already because I’ve had them in my class.” Furthermore, the village venue provided instructors the opportunity to mentor potential leaders. Leader One stated, “They’ve gone out to the villages and spent a lot of time and the mentoring relationships they have developed. Now we’ve developed the same thing with AKSOM.” When pastors from villages have a question, the relationship has been built for the pastor to call individuals within the AKSOM or Alaska Network leadership to find answers. Leader One continued by saying, “The value goes even beyond the courses themselves to the relationships that have been built. And we’ve learned when we go out to villages, it’s just been a valuable time of being with the congregations.”

Leader Three noted the benefit of the mentor relationship as well. “We have the opportunity through this educational process to mentor and to speak into their lives.” Leaders received feedback from students about what they learned and how they have been encouraged. Mentorship became an enormous part of the link for ministerial preparation. In describing the village experience, Leader Three mentioned a benefit of teaching in rural areas was instructor availability. Due to flight unavailability, instructors “can’t leave until you’re done.” The student pastor would take advantage of spending time with the instructor, building relationships which was important for encouraging students to succeed. “We have to be able to communicate with individuals and be able to counsel them through the first couple classes and encourage them through the first couple classes.”

Leader Four observed “the lack of one-on-one relationship with the student and with the institution” as a drawback when considering other potential education programs for credentialing before selecting AKSOM. In the rural environment, relationship played an important role to gain
access to the village. “We have to go by invitation. We can’t just barge in. We would purposefully go there.”

According to Leader Five: “(O)ne of the strengths of our school of ministry has been relationship-based education.” He believed it was important to spend time with the Native people and conduct one-on-one education in order to continue to have the best relationship possible with them. Instructors must be in the Alaska Native community to grow relationship but also “have community with them.” Instructors must understand and participate in the Native community. If the leaders are going to provide ministry education in rural Alaska, they must relate to the community in the bush. Instructors cannot accomplish the task “without getting right in the middle of it.”

Approachability. The theme of relationship also included approachability. Participant Four depicted AKSOM as “easily accessible” and “easy to make contacts,” due to the location of the school in Alaska, which is what drew the participant to the program. Participant Seven had experienced issues with other ministerial programs and noted that he made a call and “AKSOM was there.” Participant Eight added convenience to approachability. “It was most convenient; the most convenient and available.”

Concerning the village venue, Participant Nine described the student/instructor interaction. “(W)e were able to ask a lot of questions and hearing how others interacting with teachers…with a teacher that would take that time.” He also appreciated “how accessible it (AKSOM) was.” Participant Ten agreed regarding the approachability of the instructors. “XXX and XXX (AKSOM leaders) and the folks have been always approachable.”

Leaders also expressed a theme of approachability. Leader One mentioned if village pastors have questions, “they’ll call and they’ll ask,” based on the relationships that have been
built with the leadership.

Leader Three described the opportunities for Alaskans, especially those in rural Alaska who would not otherwise be able to attend educational programs in preparation for ministry within the Assemblies of God. The opportunity allowed students to ask questions and interact with the educator in the student’s local environment, applying the learning to the context of the learner. Leader three said that “when I fly there, the hours that we have spent dialoging and talking and just allowing all of these… in the educational process you tie one thing to the new thing you’re learning.”

In agreement with Leader One, Leader Four said, “they can contact us if they have questions.” He also shared a village experience which illustrated approachability. He had travelled to a village to teach courses. After approximately three hours, he asked the participants if they needed a break. One student replied, “Pastor, you are feeding us. Keep feeding us.” So, he kept teaching. He believed his availability allowed the student to possess a sufficient comfort level to be able to approach the instructor.

Leader Five described the historical background of AKSOM and the engagement of the instructors when he said, “[W]e started our school of ministry in 2009 and XXX and XXX (AKSOM leaders) really began to engage Pastor XXX and was going out to XXX and spending large amounts of time with him to work with him.” Leader Five had a desire for “AKSOM to always be a training vehicle that is for everyone” as well as the approachability and transparency to explain other educational opportunities to potential students.

**Flexibility**

Participants described AKSOM as exhibiting flexibility. From the village context, Participant One noted flexibility when he stated that the school was brought to the village.
Another aspect of flexibility included the ability for students to receive the course through mixed media methods. Due to the student’s distance from the main educational locations of Anchorage and Fairbanks, Participant Three attended courses through DVD and believed it worked well. Participant Three also attended courses in Juneau where they “filmed a couple of them while I was sitting in class.”

Participant Four appreciated the ability to attend classes at her convenience. She attended courses by Internet, but when her ministry took her to remote locations, the school would send a DVD. She enjoyed the portability of the course when she stated, “I liked that I could take the book with me wherever I needed to go, like I didn’t have to be in one location.”

Participant Five attended courses primarily through DVD video. Due to poor Internet capabilities at her ministry location, she could not attend courses through live stream video. She appreciated the flexibility of the courses, not only being allowed to “attend” courses at her leisure but learning “as much as you want to from the courses.”

Participant Seven described the modifications formulated by AKSOM for his situation. Internet live stream courses were unavailable due to connectivity issues. He felt the leaders of AKSOM “jump through those hurdles” to ensure training was situationally appropriate. When he began to proctor courses for his wife, the AKSOM staff continued to change the method and number of courses for her to attend to fit the educational needs. He believed the district was doing a great job streamlining AKSOM and accommodating “us oddball people and our situation…can’t fly a teacher out just for one student.”

Flexibility also included timing, not just methods, according to Participant Eight. He appreciated the “wonderful teachers that came out; I’m glad they have that in the villages instead of via teleconference.” The AKSOM staff was flexible when scheduling their visits, asking him
to set the schedule. When “life would happen” and he would have to reschedule, the team was understanding and would reschedule.

Participant Nine remarked regarding flexibility as well when stating the “AKSOM class came to the villages.” For these venues, the instructors were flexible enough to allow other students to attend who were not officially registered. When instructors would come into the village, the villages would collaborate and “people from different places, not just one place,” would come together.

Participant Ten attended AKSOM through all venue forms: distance learning, watching via simulcast, travelling to Anchorage to attend, and traveling instructors brought AKSOM to his church. He commented on the flexibility and willingness of the AKSOM leadership to allow him to finish “my certified level and my licensed level at the same time.”

Network leaders noted flexibility of the program as a strength. Leader One described flexibility as an AKSOM strength by stating, “We try to be flexible to meet the needs that are out there. For example, our simulcast system…even to the point of traveling out to all these different bush locations.” Leader Two explained AKSOM’s flexibility as “it takes the ministry to where the people are. We did teach regularly in Kenai and Fairbanks as well as Anchorage.”

Leader Three stated that AKSOM is designed as a program with flexibility, which he believed was the best word to describe the program. “It is flexible in that it allows students to not be in a particular college, per se, where they’re taking classes over a 17-week semester and so forth. Flexibility is the greatest part of AKSOM for our students.” The program allowed students to begin attending courses at any point between September and May. Leader Three also described the flexibility in the various methods for students to receive the information besides sitting in a classroom. During the classroom venues, the courses were also “simulcast” or live
streamed throughout the state of Alaska and beyond using the Internet. The courses are also recorded onto DVDs. Flexibility also applied to other aspects of education. For example, if a student left, he may return at any time. Leader Three remarked, “(l)t’s flexible enough to allow them to set up their own time schedule as time permits. They can also work in focus groups.” The flexibility to travel was “a tremendous opportunity really to be able to fly to the villages and teach people in this program first hand.”

The vision for AKSOM, as described by Leader Four, included flexibility by “taking a school everywhere in Alaska and equipping people.” The portability of AKSOM was considered a benefit of flexibility. According to Leader Four, “It’s portable in a sense that we can take it anywhere in the state. We don’t have to have a whole lot of heavy investment as far as curriculum and all that. It’s very portable.” On occasion, travel was not feasible, thus creative options were considered to maintain flexibility. Leader Four reflected, “So, if we can’t go to the village, we’ve still gotta have some way that they can have somewhat of a one-on-one. This was back before we started the Internet.” One solution was recording sessions. Leader Four surmised, “If we can video tape the classes in Anchorage, with live students and a live teacher…send that to a proctor in the village. The proctor ensures that the student watches the video and then takes the test.”

Flexibility also surfaced as a strength according to Leader Five. He believed instructors played an enormous role in flexibility by their willingness to travel to remote places to teach. “[T]he fruitfulness of our school of ministry and the effectiveness has been our ability to move around the state.” Another facet of flexibility was cross-cultural adaptability. Leader Five described AKSOM as having the “opportunity to touch a lot of different cultures and it’s very adaptable for those cultures and fits those cultures very well.” Due to the remoteness and
uniqueness of Alaska, he emphasized the various methods approved by the DSOM Association for Alaskan use such as live streaming and sending DVDs, but indicated, “we can’t just be a one-horse engine. We’ve got to have other ways of training.”

**Empowerment**

Empowerment included several key terms. The first was confidence. Participant Two believed “It (AKSOM) really helped me to be positive about my ministry. It definitely gave me confidence.” Participant Three gained confidence that “allowed me to minister in the Assemblies of God to the people.” Participant Four stated AKSOM “just strengthened my confidence” in what she was sharing with others.

Confidence in education was shared by Participant Five, who stated “It’s really given me tools, it’s really equipped me, because I found myself even going back through AKSOM books because I’ll be like, ‘I know I read about this in a you know eschatology, I know this.’”

Confidence in education and ministry was described by Participant Six. He attended courses such as cross-cultural servanthood and Systematic Theology, which gave him more understanding of God’s Word, how to minister, and how to really explain the message of God to people in various settings. Confidence in ministry and calling were noted by Participant Eight. AKSOM gave him more understanding and knowledge, adding that he will never stop learning. He felt “confident that I am doing what I need to do, what I’m called to do.”

Leader Four described the opportunity to observe students as they built their confidence. Students who did not believe they could be spiritual leaders changed their self-concept to say, “I can do this.” He further stated leaders in AKSOM provided students with “affirmation” and assisted them to “understand their own abilities and skills.” According to Leader Four, the story is repetitive of “somebody that has been invested in but just didn’t feel they had the
qualifications and we’ve been able to bring them up.” Building confidence has aided AKSOM students to “reach that empowering process.” One such student related to Leader Four: “Thank God for AKSOM. You took a boy and made a man out of him.”

Leader Five described the effects of AKSOM on one pastor and his village. “But it was transformative for him, his family, his community…And that even our church places confidence in their leadership and desire to see them lead their villages and lead their councils spiritually.”

The theme of empowerment also included support. Participant One praised the support provided by AKSOM in saying, “It is a big help in a big way for us in the village. I believe they are really a big support.” When questioned about ways to better support him, he replied, “I really don’t know what else they can do, but to just continue to be there and help.”

Participant Two felt AKSOM support was vital to her completion of the program. She stated, “But I know that if I didn’t take AKSOM I probably would still have been at the starting point.” Support in the form of a course plan was important to Participant Four. She stated that “having that schedule really helped me go through the courses because if it was left up to me; I have never been good at correspondence.”

Lack of support from a previous program was one factor affecting Participant Seven’s decision to utilize AKSOM. Administrative support from the AKSOM office was noted as an issue (books were sent when books were not needed), but he praised the program and district office for “putting more people in the office,” adding resources, and “trying to streamline” the office.

The importance of support from AKSOM was noted by Participant Eight. He believed that without AKSOM, he would not have been able to receive ministerial credentials. “At first I would have said they pushed me a little too much. But if they hadn’t pushed me, I wouldn’t be
where I am now. So, it was a good thing.”

Participant Nine appreciated the support provided by instructors “that would take that time” traveling to the remote villages. One suggestion submitted by Participant Nine to increase support was improved communication between the traveling AKSOM and the pastors ministering in neighboring villages. He believed the AKSOM venue could be used as an evangelistic tool. He knew many young people who could not come to his church because of peer pressure or the strong religion of their parents. But with a class such as AKSOM, the instructor is seen as special guest speaker offering a course. Individuals outside the church would be more likely to attend.

Participant Ten believed he was supported. “I sensed that if I’d had a need and wanted to speak it out, they would have tended to it. And the ones I did have were tended to. So, anything I needed help with was ‘Oh, Yeah.’”

Leader One expressed support should be granted to all individuals. “We really encourage not just ministerial candidates but everyone to come because you never know out of the base you are developing, who might rise up out of the AKSOM experience.”

Leader Three described how other pastors could impart the same support within their churches utilizing AKSOM. He believed if established pastors were “sold” on continuing education in his own life and ministry, then he will support and encourage others within the church to continue education. He stated, “Pastors that buy into the program and realize how effective it is, provide opportunities that encourage it within their own church.”

Empowering students also involved support by encouraging students to expand learning beyond AKSOM. According to Leader Three, “We have had students who are so talented and so gifted that we’ve done everything we can to encourage them to a four-year college. In our
situation, that’s where the mentoring comes in.”

According to Leader Four, empowerment “goes beyond an educational process in the villages. It goes beyond culture…cultural, social and very much an evangelistic opportunity as well.” He felt support and encouragement were provided to students. Leader Four described an encounter he had with an individual within the village in which he explained to a potential pastor, “You know, you can pastor this church.” He further expounded on 2 Timothy 2:2, by paraphrasing, “Timothy, the things I’ve shared with you, share with others who will share with others who will share with others who will share with others…it’s that ever-broadening ripple effect.”

Leader Five believed AKSOM support and empowerment occurred outside the classroom as well with having leaders whom “effectively speak to all age groups and helping them understand opportunities.” He felt AKSOM held a vital position within the Alaska Ministry Network. “You can’t come up with another position in the network that would be of more value and produce more fruit and be more effective in ministry preparation than the Alaska School of Ministry.” He believed the “school of ministry has trained and prepared” village pastors for their communities and they have been “empowered spiritually.”

Practical

Practicality of the program was noted. Participant One felt AKSOM courses were “not just reading”. The courses allowed him the opportunity to “get fed and learn more about what’s in the Scripture and exactly what it means.” Participant Two was able to “use the wisdom and all the knowledge they taught me to just grow in the Lord.” She believed it provided her with a greater knowledge “to be able to speak at a level above.”
Regarding practicality, Participant Three mentioned the usefulness of the textbooks. He stated that he would “go back and reread some of the other two levels…I’ve kept all the books.” Participant Four agreed with the practicality of the books. She passed on several of her textbooks to other individuals. She believed she “gleaned a lot from every book.” In addition to textbooks, Participant Four perceived the courses as “very enriching and eye opening,” and a “firm foundation.” She felt the courses also helped her with her view of how she approached ministry and people.

Participant Five utilized the AKSOM book as references. She believed the program equipped her “for a lot of stuff in the ministry and spiritually.” She also believed they assisted in her spiritual growth. She stated that “you can also grow on a spiritual level and that knowledge level of who God is” and “go deeper in prayer and deeper in your relationship with Him.”

Participant Six felt the practical part of the education was a “fun enlightening time.” He believed it taught him to be able to speak with different ranges of individuals. He believed it taught him “how to explain the message of God to people in different settings whether it’s you know an adult who is very intellectual, a young person who may not have ever heard about God.”

Participant Seven believed AKSOM enhances “your spiritual armor because you know it gets you thinking.” He also felt it excelled in causing him to think about why “you believe what you believe.”

Participant Eight echoed the idea of practical education to gain “a greater understanding” of the Word of God and its practical application. He had many questions but was unsure of how to ask them. AKSOM “actually helped me understand the questions” and the instructors “gave
me more insight.” He appreciated the information provided from varying viewpoints and outlooks. “Wow, I never read it that way. I never saw it that way.”

Participant Nine felt the instructor guided the students to become submissive to God’s Spirit, attain a better knowledge of living for Christ, and then relate that knowledge to others in the workplace. The practicality of the education allowed the students to utilize the information outside the church. Participant Ten applied his practical education. “I’ve used some of my training and actual curriculum to preach from.”

Leader One believed the practicality of education was important. He believed they were putting into practice things they had learned from the courses. He relayed an anecdote from a village trip where he visited with a village pastor. The pastor relayed to him about a course he took through AKSOM and how he was putting into practice specific items taken from the course. Between the “good quality textbooks” and the “high quality education,” Leader One felt AKSOM was of tremendous value not just for the pastor but also for the congregation. It is a valuable opportunity for Christian discipleship and development.

Practicality in ministry was conveyed by Leader Three. Students are “being prepared with courses that they take that are needed for them to be effective in the ministry of the Gospel.” The courses allowed students to prepare for ministry and provided them the opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding of Scripture. He also shared how students are putting the education into practice. He stated that they are preaching and teaching the AKSOM materials to their own congregations, allowing them to minister more effectively to the people in the village socially as well as professionally in the village.

Leader Four portrayed the education as meeting the educational requirements for credentialing. Students were given tools to become leaders and one of the tools was to assist the
leader to “rise up and begin to develop” others. The practical education assisted ministers in their development and allowed them to perpetuate what was learned. One student mentioned by Leader Four shared that “AKSOM has helped her have the tools and now she can direct people to those same tools to help them as well.”

Leader Five also described AKSOM as an opportunity to fulfill the credentialing responsibilities by meeting the requirement of the Assemblies of God. He believed in the importance of practical education, stating “You’ve got to have educational training but you need practicum. You need practical, the practical side of ministry.”

**Financially Feasible**

Before the implementation of AKSOM, cost was a prohibiting factor for many students who desired to become a minister. Participant One relayed AKSOM as having a “reasonable price” compared to leaving for college and having to pay thousands of dollars. Participant Eight agreed that “working, schooling, and trying to basically pastor a church” was not conducive to other educational programs, “so to try to leave and go to college, that wasn’t gonna work.”

Living in the village, Participant Nine described finances as a limiting factor. “Knowing that it costs a lot to travel and to pay for tuition; they can go through AKSOM.” Financially speaking, students could accomplish ministerial education goals more quickly than a person leaving for a residential school outside of Alaska.

Participant Ten travelled to Anchorage for AKSOM classes before the simulcast courses were established. “It was expensive at first.” When he discovered the simulcast venue as an available option, AKSOM became financially feasible.

Leader One described the cost of AKSOM as an advantage. He stated that “For $50 a class, I don’t think you can go anywhere else and take care of your education for that.” To
maintain low course fees, professors teach without receiving compensation. He described the ministry of the professors as “a labor of love” which has kept the cost low for producing courses.

Leader Three also believed finances were a deterrent. Far North Bible College (managed by the Alaska Ministry Network) had difficulties recruiting students from the villages because of the financial factor. The students would not have enough money to move to Anchorage and be able to repay loans for the education. AKSOM became the answer to the cost factor in that “it’s very cost effective. Students can take classes for a $25 application fee one time followed by $50 per class plus the price of a textbook. So that’s about as cost-effective as they can be.”

Leader Four also saw finances as an inhibitor of utilizing study programs outside of AKSOM. He described the Ministry Network’s attempts to utilize Berean School of the Bible, but cost was an inhibiting factor in Alaska. He believed the courses needed to be taken to the village in a cost-effective manner. He also believed requiring students to travel was not feasible. The cost of airfare to and from rural villages is approximately $1000. But he believed cost should not be prohibitive for those in the village. AKSOM was a creative solution to render an affordable educational venue, especially for those in the village. “I’ve always said if they could pay in salmon and muktuk it would be fine. But First National Bank won’t accept salmon and muktuk.”

Leader Five compared AKSOM to other district educational programs. He believed the cost of AKSOM is lower than most districts. He said, “We may charge half, maybe even less than half, of what most of them charge.”

Evidence of Quality

Validation strategies were utilized within the study as advocated by Creswell and Poth (2018). The strategies employed during the study included participant feedback, peer review,
and triangulation. Participant feedback allowed the individuals the opportunity to provide recommendations for corrections to typographical and contextual errors. Members of the dissertation committee provided feedback to fulfill the peer review strategy. Triangulation was achieved through interviewing individuals from varying perspectives such as students versus AKSOM leaders.

To ensure reliability, the researcher followed the created interview guides, used multiple methods for data collection (both audio and video), and attempted to remain unbiased. Evidence of impartiality was exhibited by revealing the less than positive items disclosed by participants such as the issue with administration.

**Summary**

Overall, AKSOM performed as the leaders intended at its conception: A financially feasible, relational program, flexible enough to meet the needs of the students; empowering them to use the practical education, to reach the lost in Alaska. AKSOM was perceived as a valuable tool by students and leaders alike.
V. DISCUSSION

Introduction

For years, the Assemblies of God in Alaska has been challenged to find and educate pastors for churches in remote villages. The Alaska School of Ministry (AKSOM) was created as an avenue to bridge the gap for educating and empowering pastors in Alaska. Due to the historical lack of pastors within the Native context (Lindsay, 2005), this study was narrowed to examine the perceptions of pastors who attended courses through AKSOM who are serving in Native villages.

The Alaska School of Ministry began in 2009 as an avenue to educate Alaskans for ministry. The model combined the Assemblies of God’s District School of Ministry (DSOM) venue model of students traveling to the educational venue, with the non-traditional, portable model utilized previously in Alaska, which took the courses to the students.

Method of Data Collection

As described in Chapter 3, the purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of pastors ministering in Alaska Native villages of AKSOM. The phenomenological methodology as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018) was utilized during this study. Fifteen pastors were interviewed; ten pastors were AKSOM alumni, while five were leaders of the AKSOM program. Participants included three women and 12 men from four Alaska Native Tribal areas. Ethnic backgrounds represented in this study were white, African American, and Alaska Native. The
interviews were composed of open-ended questions from interview guides created by the investigator (Appendix C). Audio and video methods were employed to record interviews. Recordings were transcribed and analyzed. Analysis included color-coding transcripts to discover underlying themes. Five predominant themes were determined. The five themes observed during data analysis included relationship, flexibility, empowerment, practicality, and financial feasibility. Three additional subthemes of relationship (fellowship, local, and approachable) and two additional subthemes of empowerment (confidence and support) were noted.

Summary of Results

Relationship

As noted by Cranton (2001), relationships play an enormous role in education. AKSOM was created with Alaskans in mind, designing educational venues localized to the student context. The design of the program allowed the opportunity to build relationships with leaders within the Alaska Ministry Network as well as churches in neighboring villages. The program benefitted individuals who could not otherwise leave their homes or jobs. Students appreciated Alaskan instructors providing educational opportunities within local villages. McDowell Group (2001) noted a similar finding in their tribal college research study by stating, “Leaving home and the community is difficult, so some felt having more on-site instruction in rural areas would be a good approach” (p. 78).

Minister and leader participants noted the importance of relationship in educational endeavors. Students praised the ability to fellowship with the AKSOM instructor as well as learn collaboratively with other students. In certain instances, individuals from neighboring villages
would converge in one location to attend courses with the traveling instructor, enhancing village relationships as well.

Students also noted the approachability of the instructors. Instructors made themselves available during the village visit to the students outside the educational venue to mentor and build rapport. Participants felt able to freely contact instructors or AKSOM staff. During the contact, students would receive necessary assistance and encouragement. Positive experiences with communication and support encouraged the investigator since Lindsay (2005) noted during his study a “lack of communication and assistance from district officials” (p.125).

**Flexibility**

Educational programs must fit the learning style of the student (Saba, 2012). Participants were grateful for the flexibility of the AKSOM program. Participants’ preferred learning methods (in the classroom, through the Internet, or by DVD) varied; however, they appreciated the option to learn in various ways, at various locations, and at various times. Leaders noted flexibility as a fundamental value of the program. The theme of flexibility also reinforced the findings from the study conducted by Lindsay (2005), which showed the preference of Alaska Natives to conduct classes in the local church context.

**Empowerment**

Students need to feel empowered and supported in their learning ventures (Lawler & King, 2000). Participants believed they were empowered through the relationships built with the instructors, which enabled them to persevere in their studies and spiritual lives. Campbell (2013) noted “We, too, must develop strong relationship with those we seek to empower” (p. 31). Students gained confidence through the encouragement of the instructors, believing AKSOM provided them with the tools needed to share the Gospel and spiritually lead those in their village
environment. According to Gibson (2004), students with a higher perception of self-efficacy were more likely to achieve educational goals. Students also perceived a sense of support in their educational endeavor which was vital to their continuation of the process. Doyle, Kleinfeld, and Reyes (2009) noted that students leaving the village for college “were only successful when their encouragement was followed up with direct, personalized assistance to students” (p. 31).

**Practical**

Curriculum must be useful and relevant to the student (Oliva et al., 2013). AKSOM courses provided effective education for ministry and credentialing requirements. Students gained knowledge and tangible resources useful to their calling and situation. Students were able to put into action what was learned, which included preaching from the supplied course materials. The instruction was useful for personal spiritual growth, allowing students to grow deeper in their relationship with the Lord and application of God’s Word.

Increased knowledge of living for Christ enabled all class attendees—not just AKSOM enrolled students—to relate to individuals in their workplace more effectively. Attendees believed they built confidence to share the Gospel and the love of Christ with people they interacted with daily. Peiffer (2005) noted a demand for workplace relationships in his findings: “We need apostles in the market places, in the governmental arenas, within the educational structures, as well as in the conventional missionary capacity, to be reformers in their God-given spheres of influence” (p. 55).

**Financially Feasible**

Cost has traditionally been an issue for students who would like to attend formal schooling (Brayboy et al., 2015). Martin (2016) noted that private debt was the only means
available for many students who wished to attend college. Students believed cost was a prohibiting factor for their attendance to traditional ministerial educational avenues. Students were unable to leave their villages (either permanently or temporarily) to attend school due to employment and familial commitments. Correspondence courses were expensive and generated a four- to six-week lag time. AKSOM was considered a cost-effective, reasonably priced program, particularly for those in the village and remote Alaskan context. Students reiterated the impossibility to otherwise acquire credentials if not for the AKSOM program. Financial feasibility also reinforced Lindsay’s (2005) findings which stated that financial concerns were the most common impediment for both Native and non-Native individuals for pastoral preparation.

Discussion of Research Questions

Two research questions served as the foundation for the study and steered the formation of the interview guides.

Research Question 1: How do pastors in Alaska Native Villages perceive the Alaska School of Ministry?

Throughout the interviews, the ten student participants expressed a positive perception of the program, utilizing terminology such as “marvelous,” “encouraging,” and “enlightening.” AKSOM was considered an opportunity to grow spiritually and intellectually, enhancing the spiritual life of the participants. AKSOM provided not only an increase in the understanding of the Bible, but also in the participants’ confidence and preparation for ministry. Overall, participants viewed the program as beneficial but also provided recommendations for improvement.
The five leaders perceived the program as a valuable tool for educating ministerial leaders. The program provided the leaders with the opportunity to interact with students as they prepared for credentialing and to build lifelong mentoring relationships. Leaders believed the time spent with the students was mutually beneficial. Leaders provided personalized education in church leadership while students taught leaders concerning village life and culture. The reciprocal educational experiences cultivated enduring relationships for all parties involved. Overall, AKSOM was perceived as effective and a valuable asset for educating ministers in Alaska.

**Research Question 2: What are the perceived effects of the Alaska School of Ministry on ministries and villages of these pastors?**

The ten minister participants relayed various positive effects on their ministry and their village. Participants gained the ability to speak more effectively to those in their village and regard those individuals in a more positive way. The participants not only increased interpersonal relations within the village but were also able to approach ministry from a different standpoint, such as the addition of cultural aspects to their ministry. AKSOM facilitated an increase in Scriptural knowledge for the local churches and allowed the parishioners to hear the Word preached from the itinerant minister’s perspective. AKSOM educators, many of which held graduate degrees in education or theology, communicated through analogies and personal ministerial experiences.

Participants enhanced preaching within their churches by preaching from what they learned during the educational venues. By opening courses to everyone living in or near the village, members within the community received Biblical education and assisted in spreading the Gospel in their workplaces, not just through the efforts of the potential pastors.
The five leaders noted the increase of Alaska Native pastors in various villages where ministers were not previously available. Leaders observed a positive reception of the program from the village inhabitants as well as an increase in discipleship within the local churches. AKSOM was regarded as an evangelistic tool, empowering individuals to minister in their social context. One leader noted students received their vocational call to ministry while attending AKSOM venues. As Campbell (2013) noted, “It is in the local church setting that God demonstrates His calling and equipping of future leaders” (p. 96).

**Study Limitations**

This study exhibited several limitations. First, the study included only 15 participants from various areas within Alaska but could not include all students or alumni. Conducting a study of all students would also not be feasible due to the total number of students. The study included only students who attended the Alaska Ministry Network conference in 2017; thus, not all ministers from every region of Alaska attended.

Students participated in only one interview. Multiple interviews with the same participants would have enhanced the study but were also not feasible due to travel and time constraints and sample size. One interview session included three participants. The session was not intended to be conducted as a focus group, but conducted simultaneously due to the time constraints of the three participants. Observations of AKSOM’s educational venues within the village construct would have also enhanced the current study. Observations and participant interviews were not conducted in the participant’s village due to the difficulty and expense of travel to village locations.

Finally, the study utilized a qualitative methodology, employing interviews with open-ended questions. The method allowed for potential errors in interpretation by not providing
specific, pre-set answers as in an objective quantitative study. The quantitative approach would have ensured a more robust sense of anonymity, eliminating the subjective aspects of the study.

**Implications for Future Practice**

Data gathered from the study could be used for continuous improvement of the AKSOM program as well as curriculum development for future courses. Recommendations for improvement collected through interviews have been provided anonymously to AKSOM.

Given that the study included participants from Alaska, the educational methods (flexible curriculum and delivery, portable, culturally relevant, and relational) could be shared with other denominations within the state of Alaska to assist in the education of their pastors. The educational methods utilized by AKSOM could also be used in other regions of the world where difficulties developing pastors exist due to remoteness of location.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

AKSOM is a District School of Ministry (DSOM) recognized by the General Council of the Assemblies of God. Thirty-two affiliated DSOMs exist within the Association of District Schools of Ministry (ADSOM). An examination of other DSOMs could be conducted to discover the existence of possible common themes as well as to unearth potential improvements. A follow-up longitudinal study to investigate if participant perceptions change over time could also be accomplished.

Since the AKSOM program has been in effect since 2009, a longitudinal study could be performed involving pastors who began the program at its inception. The study could examine the perceptions of the original pastors regarding AKSOM and their preparedness for ministry. The study could be performed in conjunction with travel to village venues to allow ministers to be interviewed in their local churches.
In response to travel and financial constraints, a quantitative study could be conducted utilizing a closed-ended survey delivered either in printed format through the mail system or electronically. The quantitative survey method would allow students to provide objective, anonymous feedback for the program.

**Conclusion**

Historical accounts exposed the attempts of Christian missionaries to civilize Alaska’s indigenous tribal groups, producing within Alaska Natives a lack of self-efficacy and a wariness for western education and religion. The lack of self-worth delayed many Alaskans from heeding the call into ministry, leaving village pulpits vacant. A study conducted by Lindsay (2005) laid the foundation for the creation of AKSOM, empowering individuals to acknowledge their worth and mission. The current study reinforced those findings. Overall, AKSOM was perceived by participants as a valuable instrument for Alaskans preparing for ministry. The essence of AKSOM appeared to be as the leaders intended at its conception: A financially feasible, relational program flexible enough to meet the needs of the students; empowering them to use the practical education to reach those in Alaska in need of the Savior.
REFERENCES


Alaska District Council (2009). Anointed for the journey. Anchorage, AK.


Lindsay, N. R. (2005) *Assessment of pastoral preparation of Alaska natives in the Assemblies of*


APPENDICES
Appendix A

Interview Demographics

Name: ________________________________________________________________________

Age:__________________________  Where were you born? ____________________________

Alaska Native? __________   If yes, please provide name of tribe ________________________

Where do you minister: __________________________________________________________

Number of years in ministry: ______________________________________________________

Level of credentials: ______________________________________________________________

Consent

Title of Project:  A Phenomenological Study of Native Village Pastors’ Perceptions of the Alaska School of Ministry (AKSOM)

Responsible Principal Investigator:       Dr. Kevin Weaver

Other Investigator(s):        Cynthia Cohen, Dr. Wade Cogan, Dr. Janet Deck

1. Purpose of the Study:  To understand how ministers in Alaska Native villages perceive AKSOM.

2. Procedures to be followed:  Participants would be interviewed using semi-structured interview guides.

3. Discomforts and Risks:  No physical, psychological, emotional or economic risks are anticipated.
4. **Benefits:** This study would benefit AKSOM and the Alaska Ministry Network in uncovering any improvements that might need to be made to the program. The results may also benefit the other District Schools of Ministry in the Assemblies of God.

5. **Statement of Confidentiality:** All data, including personal information, will remain confidential. Demographic sheets will be kept in the custody of the interviewer inside privacy envelopes. Audio and video files from interviews will be saved to a USB drive and maintained within one of the privacy envelopes. Only the interviewers and researchers will have access to the information.

6. **Whom to contact:** Please contact Dr. Kevin Weaver with any questions, or concerns about the research. He may be reached at kweaver@seu.edu. You may also call the Dr. Weaver if you feel you have been injured or harmed by this research. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the SEU Institutional Review Board at 863 667 5097 or via email at pbleblanc@seu.edu.

7. **Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated.

8. **Cost of participating:** There are no costs for participating.

9. **Voluntariness:** Participation is voluntary and the participant may discontinue at anytime without any penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled. If appropriate, state, "the decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on the subject's grades at, status at, or future relations with Southeastern University."

10. **Dissemination:** The information gathered from this study will be used in a doctoral dissertation.

11. **Participant Acknowledgment:**

   □ I am 18 years of age or older. (when appropriate)
   □ I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
   □ You were given a copy of this consent form for your records.

   __________________________________________  ________________
   Participant Signature  Date

   ____________________________
   Print Name
Appendix B

Interview Demographics (Network Leaders)

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Ministry position: ______________________________________________________

Years in ministry: ______________________________________________________

Years with AKSOM: _____________________________________________________

Consent

Title of Project: A Phenomenological Study of Native Village Pastors’ Perceptions of the Alaska School of Ministry (AKSOM)

Responsible Principal Investigator: Dr. Kevin Weaver

Other Investigator(s): Cynthia Cohen, Dr. Wade Cogan, Dr. Janet Deck

1. Purpose of the Study: To understand how ministers in Alaska Native villages perceive AKSOM.

2. Procedures to be followed: Participants would be interviewed using semi-structured interview guides.

3. Discomforts and Risks: No physical, psychological, emotional or economic risks are anticipated.

4. Benefits: This study would benefit AKSOM and the Alaska Ministry Network in uncovering the strengths and weaknesses of the program. The results may also benefit the other District Schools of Ministry in the Assemblies of God.

5. Statement of Confidentiality: All data, including personal information, will remain confidential. Demographic sheets will be kept in the custody of the interviewer inside privacy
envelopes. Audio and video files from interviews will be saved to a USB drive and maintained within one of the privacy envelopes. Only the interviewers and researchers will have access to the information.

6. **Whom to contact:** Please contact Dr. Kevin Weaver with any questions, or concerns about the research. He may be reached at kweaver@seu.edu. You may also call the Dr. Weaver if you feel you have been injured or harmed by this research. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the SEU Institutional Review Board at 863 667 5097 or via email at pbleblanc@seu.edu.

7. **Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated.

8. **Cost of participating:** There are no costs for participating.

9. **Voluntariness:** Participation is voluntary and the participant may discontinue at anytime without any penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled. If appropriate, state, "the decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on the subject's grades at, status at, or future relations with Southeastern University."

10. **Dissemination:** The information gathered from this study will be used in a doctoral dissertation.

11. **Participant Acknowledgement:**

   - I am 18 years of age or older. (when appropriate)
   - I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
   - You were given a copy of this consent form for your records.

   __________________________________________  ______________________
   Participant Signature                        Date

   ______________________________________________________________________________________________
   Print Name
Appendix C

Interview Guide – Pastors

Note to investigators: In the Alaska Native culture, individuals will take time to think before answering. Allow for silence after asking the questions to provide time to think about the answer.

1. Icebreaker - Please tell me about how you came to know the Lord.

2. Please tell me about your calling to be a pastor.

3. Please tell me about your experiences with AKSOM. What you think about AKSOM and the training it provides?

4. How has AKSOM impacted your life and the lives of those in your church/village?

5. How has AKSOM prepared you for credentials? Why did you choose AKSOM?

6. How can we improve AKSOM to better support you?

If not Alaska Native, how did you arrive to the village in which you are serving? What was it like to adapt into the Native culture?
Appendix D

Interview Guide – AKSOM Leaders

1. What do you see as some of the strengths and weaknesses of AKSOM? How is it unique compared to other methods of credentials training?

2. What effects have you seen of AKSOM on the lives of pastors and their villages?

3. Please tell me some of your experiences with AKSOM in the Alaska Native villages.
Appendix E

Interview Transcript, Participant One

Interviewer (I) - So, first is can you tell me how you came to know the Lord (Q1)?

Participant One (P1) – Um, I guess first of all, I can say that we both came together at the same time. All three of us. Um, we got invited to a service in XXXX. An evangelist came out. There was a musician and XXXX XXXXX and he shared his messages. And um from that point on…God touched our hearts. And we got hungrier for him and what God had for us.

I – Cool. And what year was that? Do you remember?

P1 Spouse – 93…94.

P1 – (nods) Yep.

I – So what was your, um, tell me about your calling to be a pastor (Q2)?

P1 – Um…The way God called me was way back in the past. I was sitting in the Catholic Church and um He came and stood…Jesus came and stood behind me. And as the priest was performing his duties, he was lifting the wine glass and the host and Jesus said these words to me, “That’s where I want you to be.” And my answer was no. And I said I needed a family. I wanted a family, I didn’t need it, but I wanted a family. And then I never heard anything for a number of years. Until I was, we were in our, back in 93, that’s when God started doing more and speaking into our lives. And that’s when He put ministry in my heart.

I – So how did you become the pastors at XXXX?

P1 – Um, as we started coming to church more and more, the first pastors we got saved under left, and there was an elderly lady by the name of XXXX XXXXXXX who was a missionary there for years and years and years. And she came in and filled in until…she didn’t want to leave XXXX empty. So she came out and was filling in the spot. But also see, she had cancer and was going in for treatment. And as she was going in for treatment, um she told XXXX and I to take care of the church. And that’s when I started studying more of the Bible and to pray and study what to share for Sundays and Wednesdays, our weeknight services. And that’s how we got started.

I – So, how did you find out about AKSOM?

P1 – We, uh, before AKSOM started, there was VBTC (Village Bible Training Circuit) and um XXXX XXXX and XXXX were coming out and teaching us some classes. And that’s where I got part of credits for…to get my…to get credentialed. And also um another couple, XXXX and XXXX XXXX, were doing the same thing and…for a few years and then the program changed to the Alaska School of Ministry. And they came to XXXX and started teaching and um…I don’t remember who it was, who was it the first time…
P1 Spouse – XXXX

P1 – XXXX XXXX and then um he started teaching and then um the next thing I know…before then I was…I took a Berean course…by teleconference with another pastor in XXXX and um…and so I had my classes that way…one class…and um and then a day or two later, I got a call. And they put together all the schooling I had with VBTC and “Because We Care” youth ministry. And then with some of the AKSOM classes that I had gotten started, they added everything together to where I just needed to, I think 2 more classes. And took those and passed. But before I took those two classes, to get certified, I was provisioned so I came in and went through the process of going in to the line, um, um, orientation where I got my first step of ministry credentialing. So I got certified then. And that’s what AKSOM did to help…to get certified.

I – What do you think about the training that they gave you…that AKSOM gave you (Q3)?

P1 – I think it was uh, I not only think, I know it is a good program. The school is brought to the village and um at a reasonable price, where it doesn’t cost…to where you go to a college and you have to pay so many thousands of dollars. And in a way they help pay for it by coming out and presenting the classes. And the credits would be added to our file. It is a big help in a big way for us in the village.

I – So how has it impacted not just your ministry life, has it had any type of impact on your village as a whole (Q4)?

P1 – As a whole, it impacted those who would come to the church and come to church services…and further get fed and learn more about what’s in the Scripture and exactly what it means. Not just reading and saying this…what I think it says but they got an in-depth of what it meant. What God is saying to us. So that’s how AKSOM helps.

I – When you were telling me about not having to leave for school, you actually answered other questions that I had to ask so we are down to the last question. Is there anything that we can do in AKSOM to support you better (Q6)?

P1 – From what AKSOM does, I believe they are really a big support. And if there is anything they can do more, I really don’t know what else they can do, but to just continue to be there and help. Because sooner or later and just like in the other villages that have looked at pastors, that came to AKSOM, and will hear the call. And it didn’t just happen overnight for me to hear the call. But it was just a constant tugging the heart or touching the heart where God will say…where He puts a burden, because it’s His burden He gives us. And by way of hearing what AKSOM teachers would say, that God will speak to them. To those who aren’t only going to be called to ministry but who can be of service in any way to serve the people of the community. In the way that AKSOM provides the information…what comes through…what AKSOM teaches.

I – Wonderful, that really is all the questions that I had. Did you have anything you wanted to share?

P1 Spouse – No, No I think he pretty much answered all the questions.
I – Well, do you mind if, if I come up with any other questions, or I have a question about an answer that you gave, do you mind if I call you at another time to, just to clarify, Okay?

P1 – Okay.
Interview Transcript, Participant Two

Interviewer (I) – So how did you come to know the Lord (Q1)?

Participant Two (P2) – When I was a little girl, maybe 6 or 7 years old, I might have been grounded because I was home. And there is a Christian radio station from Nome that would always mail “Because We Care” tapes - cassette tapes - and since I was bored, I happened to play it and hear the sermon going on...about getting to know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior. And I ended up saying a sinner’s prayer and asking Jesus into my heart. As a little girl, God would always tell me what to pray for and how to pray and He would speak to me...I had that sensitive side. And when my parents got saved, I went to church with them and again felt really hungry, as a little girl. When I became a teenager, I got rebellious and didn’t really care about church or anything. I attended UAA...the college...I was studying to be an engineer. And there was a missions group that went to XXXX. In 2007, I did my first missions trip to Nome during the Iditarod. And I felt some kind of calling. I didn’t know what it was but I really liked doing that missions trip. And then my dad...I was talking with him on the phone about that trip and then he told me there was a group that came here from XXXX and they did a missions trip here. And I told him, “Cool. I wonder if I could go with them next time.” And I started thinking, “Oh man, I think I feel like I’m called there” but I didn’t tell anybody. For three years, every time I heard about them going back to XXXX, I would feel like “Hey, cool. They’re coming.” And I would just sit and listen. And then on the third year, I’m feeling called to go. It was a bad tugging on my heart. And I was even trying to find all kinds of excuses, thinking I don’t want to do any ministry work. And then I would always tell God “No. I’m at school. I need to finish my schoolwork before I do anything.” Because I don’t like to stop when I start...quit what I start. On that third year, I started to feel life was hopeless and then God like called me...or He reminded me, “You are not where you are supposed to be.” And then I ended up uh asking Him why do I feel like I’m...I don’t have any hope. Why do I feel like I don’t have a life?” And He’d remind me. And finally, when I got a hold of the application for that ministry school – Master’s Commission in XXXX. And, I applied just in case but I was thinking, “Nope. I’m not gonna go. I’m just gonna apply just in case because the deadline was coming up.” And then that fall, toward the end of the fall semester, God like...I wasn’t doing good in one of my classes and I was tired of failing. And I didn’t want to drop that class, because that’s what I kept doing through the years. And then I heard...while I was pulling an all-nighter studying. I heard God tell me “Go grab your Bible.” And there was this friend that gave me a list of verses to read. And He told me to take those verses and start reading them. And right when I started reading them, I felt alive again. I felt the joy of the Lord fall in that apartment I was living in. So I said, “Alright God, what can I do to get more of this and He told me to just go to the ministry school. So I ended up agreeing to God’s calling but I told God, “Only one year.” And
when I was in the ministry school, I started right at New Years of 2011. And I went there and there was major spiritual warfare. I felt lots of different emotional feelings. And then that was when I went ahead and took AKSOM. At first I was thinking, “What is this class? I don’t really care about it. I don’t want to do it.” Because I was still rebellious to God. But I was just…I was somewhat obedient to Him but still telling Him, “You’re not gonna tell me…you’re not gonna make me do ministry.” And then when I started taking the AKSOM classes, and reading them, I started realizing how important it was to be obedient to the call that God had over my life. Because there was one book, I don’t remember the name of it, where it talked about how there’s people you are gonna be assigned to…you’re gonna have to tell them about the Lord and in the life and death situation where they are either going to end up in heaven or hell and talked about…the book really went deep into what will happen in the last days. That really, really got to me. And it really changed my perspective of ministry and I really saw how important it was. Like I knew that. I knew that it was important and I didn’t want to accept it and I didn’t care about it because I was rebellious. I was really stubborn too. After taking maybe the third or fourth AKSOM class I felt my heart start to change…start to soften. And when it started to soften, God started to slowly use me. And I ended up taking ministry seriously, taking God seriously. And I learned a lot taking those AKSOM classes and courses. Being in that ministry school for two years, I ended up going up to the licensing level and completing all of those classes. And once I was done with that ministry school, I ended up feeling called to go back home to XXXX to work with the youth. Well, working with the youth like right when I got there it was gonna be kind of hard to get a job because it’s a small village, maybe jobs would probably be kind of like hard to get. I didn’t know what I was gonna do. So my dad knew that I had everything working with youth so he told me to get started. I started having youth nights and I started out with six and that year I ended up with maybe 29. And then years later, maybe about 40. It was really good…good nights of having youth nights where everyone will just want to show up. And then in maybe 2015, I got certified and then 2016 I got Licensed. And because of AKSOM, I was able to…it really helped me to be positive about my ministry and to use the wisdom and all the knowledge they taught me to just grow in the Lord. Because I didn’t really have any motivation to read the Bible. I didn’t really have that want of praying unless it was needed. But other than that I think I don’t want to do that. Because my heart was still in college…still at college. I still wanted to go back to college and finish my degree and work as an engineer. God ended up having other plans.

I – So do you feel that AKSOM has prepared you then for your credentials and set you up for success (Q5)?

P2 – (Nods) I would think about doing it all by myself because I already didn’t like the program – the ministry school that I attended – because of all the warfare and all the little things that I had to work on with myself. And I would think, “Well, I could probably do this on my own.” But I know that if I didn’t take AKSOM, I probably would still have been at the starting point.
I – So, how do you think we can better support you with AKSOM (Q6)? Is there anything…I don’t want to put words in your mouth…some mentorship or relationship or change of curriculum…is there anything that you can think of that would make AKSOM better?

P2 – Keep doing what you are doing. I don’t think there is anything that I can see that they need to work on.

I – Do you feel supported from the District office?

P2 – Yep

I – From XXXX and XXXX?

P2 – Yep. XXXX already wants to get me started on my Ordination level but I don’t wanna…I kinda want to wait because I feel that I am still adjusting to the Licensing level.

I – And that’s OK. I know I’m not supposed to talk because this is your interview, but I got Licensed…uh Certified…in 2009. I didn’t get Licensed until 2015 because I was waiting for XXXX to catch up. And then we are getting Ordained tomorrow night. So, but it’s all in His timing. He’ll tell you…He’ll give you your kick in your pants whenever…

P2 – Just when I was feeling…I was getting comfortable with the Certified level, I ended up getting my License and I felt the shift of the air…even with the warfare too. Kinda was I could pinpoint the… right ahead of my…because I learned how to discern warfare but once I got my Licensing level, the warfare escalated a lot. And I didn’t realize it was allowing me to just control my mood. But now that I realize that there was more warfare when I am doing what God wants me to do…because I am doing what God wants me to do and I am obedient with Him to know that the Devil’s more mad about it.

I – So we know when we have those trials going on, we must be doing something.

P2 – Right.

I – So do you think…I’m gonna jump back because I am wanna… I want you to expand on this if you don’t mind…So you talked about how AKSOM has changed your life, how has it…

P2 – You mean my life in the ministry?

I – Yes, your life in the ministry…And I even wrote that down…How do you feel it has affected your village and the youth that you reach (Q4)? Because you have attended Bible classes.

P2 – I’m able to approach them on a more positive way, instead of telling them, “Hey, you shouldn’t be doing that.” I can be like, “Hey, this is what the Bible says.” So it gave me more like knowledge to be able to speak at a level above…how ministers should.

I – Maybe a confidence?
P2 – (Nods) Mmm Hmm. It definitely gave me confidence and the boldness too because uh even with the young adults, that come up to me and ask me questions or they need encouragement, like I’ll know what, where, why things were how they were. The way that the AKSOM courses break down certain parts of the Bible.

I – Awesome. Is there anything else that you would like to share or anything else that I should put in my paper?

P2 – I think that’s good.

I – Alright, thank you very much.
Appendix G

Interview Transcript, Participant Three

Interviewer (I) – So thank you again for participating in my study. I’m pretty excited about it. Um, so the first question is tell me how you came to know the Lord (Q1).

Participant Three (P3) – At a Christmas Cantata in 1975 in a Independent Pentecostal church.

I – And what about your calling to be a pastor (Q2)?

P3 – My wife was called first and I got called about three years later. We’ve both been saved since before we were married nearly 40 years ago.

I – And XXXX is considered a native village, right?

P3 – XXXX is not.

I – But where you minister

P3 – There’s Native people but it is not really a Native village.

I – OK. Um, have you always lived in Alaska?

P3 – No, we came here first in ‘03 to a small village, a Native village called XXXX, Alaska.

I – How difficult was it to adapt to the Native culture?

P3 – Not so bad the culture as the distance from family, but it is totally different. Coming from western XXXX and the South to a village. It was like the stone age meeting the 21st century.

I – What brought you to Alaska?

P3 – The call of ministry. Missions. I was there first as a missionary.

I – So what have been your experiences with AKSOM (Q3a)?

P3 – When I transferred my license from the Church of God to Assemblies of God, I needed to take some classes to read the history and those kinds of things. So, I started the classes and got my certified license then in the following year maybe two years later I did some more classes for the Licensed level. And now I’m up for License…I guess next for the Ordained. But I’ve done all those through AKSOM. I’m already Ordained in the Church of God but to switch licenses. I think I’d have it easier now but back then I had to start all over.

I – So what do you think of the training that AKSOM provides (Q3b)?
P3 – I think it’s great. The books they choose are really good and the lessons, the questionnaires are taken right from the book. And they pretty much follow the order of the book, so you are not jumping all around. Just as you are reading the book you come upon the questions. So, they have laid it out really well. I did several in person and several on CDs they just sent to me because of our distance.

I – How do you think AKSOM has impacted your life and the lives of those in your church (Q4)?

P3 – Educated me to or gave me a better education of the Word of God and allowed me to minister in the Assemblies of God to the people. We have been there in XXXX for 9 years now.

I – And when did you start with AKSOM?

P3 – Probably uh…

I – They began in 2009.

P3 – Would have been by end of 2009. They were still, right in the beginning. I started about the time they did.

I – And do you feel that…how do you feel it’s prepared you for your credentials (Q5)?

P3 – Very good. I’m gonna go back and reread some of the other two levels first before going to the ordained. It’s been 7-8 years. I’ve kept all the books…all the questions and answers because they go so good together.

I – I kept all my text overviews too.

P3 – Me too.

I – Why did you choose AKSOM instead of Berean or any of the others (Q5)?

P3 – Seemed like a great fit. It’s local here in Alaska. Handled here. XXXX and…XXXX was the director at that time…traveled around and did classes in Juneau which was the closest town to us to do them in. They did the DVDs and the CDs training, so it worked really well. Alaska ministry for Alaskans.

I – What can we in AKSOM do to better support you (Q6)?

P3 – I don’t uh…More classes in the small areas you know classes in Southeast. They already do things in the Northwest and different places. But it depends on whether they have a number of students. If they have 5 or 6 students at the same time, that same level then they put together a class.

I – How do you feel that support has been so far from the staff?
P3 – Very good. Excellent.

I – Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experiences with AKSOM or being a pastor with um Native people groups?

P3 – No, nothing I can say I don’t think. The different people groups are not as hard to get used to in XXXX as they were XXXX. XXXX had whites in it before XXXX…sooner so they have come a little further along. There’s a lot of Tlingits there. And most…half of our church or three-quarters is some part Tlingit. Several full and have a lot of halves and a few quarters. So it is still Native ministry mostly. And we check on the Native village of XXXX which is 20 miles away. We fill in there and have joint services with them.

I – Guess what? That was only seven minutes. Well, thank you so very much.

P3 – I didn’t talk much

I – That’s OK. Do you mind though if I come up with another question or, and again the reason I am taping this is because I am just scratching notes and I want to make sure that I write down everything that was said. But if I have a question later or have any follow-up questions, do you mind if I call or email you?

P3 – (Shakes head) No. Do you have my numbers?

I – I don’t think so. I’ll have you write that on there for me.

P3 – Ok. And where do you go to church?

I – XXXX with Pastor XXXX. I just gotta say how…what a great help he has been. I am not normally a…my husband’s a very outgoing person. And I am normally not. And so, it’s hard for me to…this has been very difficult to talk to people. So yeah, he’s

P3 – It’s the other way with us. My wife’s the outgoing person. I do most of my talking from the pulpit. So, when I’m not in the pulpit, I don’t talk a lot.

I – It’s difficult…I don’t know what to say. So, he’s been a big help walking around “Have you met…Let me introduce you.”

P3 – Yep. He looked around. And like I said, I started about the very same time they started AKSOM so they were still putting together the paperwork and the books. And the first DVDs they hadn’t even made. Probably filmed a couple of them while I was sitting in class with them. I think he was there when I did my interview to get my license. You have to be there in Juneau and sat in with us. He’s been…I know since I started ministry here in XXXX. I came up from the…I knew we were called to missions in Alaska. So, I happened to be sitting across the table from somebody who used to be the missions director in Alaska. I didn’t know that when I sat down at this dinner table. So my wife asks, “Is there even any Church of God”…we were
Church of God licensed then…or she was… “In Alaska?” And he said, “Yeah” and wrote down the director’s number and so I called him or emailed him and said, “Where’s the biggest need in Alaska? I know God’s calling us to Alaska but where.” So, he offered us 4 or 5 churches, some with a hundred, hundred twenty people, full salaries and parsonages. But he said, “Since you’ve”…P.S.’d at the bottom… “Since you’ve asked ‘where was the biggest need,’ it’s in XXXX, Alaska.” As far as he was concerned, it’s not one of ours, it’s a Pentecostal Holiness church…still Pentecostal but a different denomination. And that never happens, one denomination sends you to another. So, when I called the pastor, he said, “Well I can’t promise you anything.” He said, “I don’t know how you got my number whatever…yeah, we need help.” So, he gave me his director’s number. His director said, “How in the world did you hear in North Carolina that we need pastoral help in XXXX, Alaska, 5000 miles away?” It was just an act of God. And that’s when he said, “I can’t promise you anything.” And I said, “Well I’m not disrespecting you in any way, shape, or form, but I’m not coming because you called. I’m coming because God called.” He said, “Well, in that situation then, come on up and we’ll see what God does.” So, we took over the church for a couple of years, the pastor had been sick, and then brought the church from Pentecostal Holiness into the Church of God at that time because Pentecostal Holiness had three churches left in Alaska. And we had the biggest and we were in the smallest place. The one in Fairbanks and the one in Anchorage were both just dying away. Fairbanks, I preached in one of their last services there and it wasn’t much bigger than this, no heat, toilet didn’t work, falling apart. I said, “You all ought to be ashamed to call this a church.” And they closed it shortly after that. And the main church in Anchorage didn’t have 15-20 people in it. I said Pentecostal Holiness just isn’t putting enough effort into this place, so I brought our church over into Church of God at the time. And they had a lot more support. And then when we came to uh…we left Alaska to go take care of my mother in XXXX…with brain cancer…and we came back, I called the company I had worked for at the border station near XXXX, and asked them if they had any work, they offered me other jobs all over the country. And I said, “No, Alaska.” They still kept sending me jobs all over the country and I said, “No, Alaska.” And they finally sent one…an email about XXXX, Alaska. I said, “Yes.” Now I had to figure out “Where is XXXX?” I had to get out the map. It’s in Alaska, we know God’s calling us to Alaska so that must be where God’s taking us. Three days later we got a call from the Church of God, “Hey we want to give you this church out in XXXX.” I said, “But the job that I got offered is over here in XXXX…opposite sides of the country or the state.”

I – Can’t just drive

P3 – Yeah. And it’s too far anyhow. So, then we tried to pray for three or four days and fast… “What do we do? How do we say no to an offer of a church or a ministry and say yes to a job?” Then after three days we didn’t have any peace. My wife especially about going to XXXX. And I told her “God doesn’t lead by fear.” So, we’re not taking that. I said we’ll take this and see what God does. And she said, “What about a ministry?” I said, “If God’s calling is this job, then He must have a ministry there.” And about three weeks later, I found out…I visited the church.
They were without a pastor and had been looking for one for two years. Somebody, the day before, the board meeting...pastoral search...had been talking. “We have 3 or 4 applicants but can’t afford to bring them all up from the lower 48 to try them out. What are we gonna do?”

One lady said, “God’s gonna give us a pastor from here. And somebody else got adamant about it and said, “There are no pastors here. That’s why we’re doing it.” She said, “God’s gonna give us a pastor from here. The next day I visited. The next Sunday, I filled in. And from then on, it’s just been an act of God. Because they were saying, “You have to pay to get yourself up here, you have to be self-supportive, all these things because we can’t afford it.” And God provided all of that. He gave me a full-time job that paid everything. They moved me up here and everything else. So, that’s why we are still in XXXX. Ask us how long we will be there? Until God tells us something different.

I – Till God says move.

P3 – So it’s been an exciting ride…and challenging. When you are 5000 miles from family. I have family down in XXXX, XXXX, and XXXX. So that’s the hardest part. Being away from grandkids and kids. That’s the dying to self, daily...not packing up and moving south.

I – That’s part of our problem too. My family’s in California, his mom lives in Reno, his dad lives in Texas. We were both in the military. I had 22 years in the Air Force and he spent 21.

P3 – Is that what brought you to Alaska originally?

I – Mmm hmm. We came up here in 2006. We started Berean classes at King’s Way and then towards the end then it was Far North, then it went to AKSOM. And we thought for sure...we knew when we got there, God was calling us to King’s Way and that’s where we would serve. I had this dream about setting up a coffee house. Kind of like a coffee house church at the end of the property. And then like a month later, the military says, “You have to move.” I’m like, “No, I have three years left and I can retire.” And even with my year group, they wouldn’t let anyone retire early. I had to do three more years or lose all my retirement.

P3 – Lose all your time.

I – So, we were praying, “Okay Lord. This…Come on! You said we were…” So, we went down to Texas and did my three years there and coming back was like, No, Texas is not where we need to be. We need to be in Alaska. Driving through California in the RV, my parents were like, “You know there are churches here?” “Yes, we know, but God is calling us back.” We…no sooner drove into town and went to church that Sunday, Pastor Jack said, “What are you doing?” “Well, we don’t know yet.” Newly retired, we didn’t know what we were doing. He said, “Come see me on Tuesday.” And we’ve been working at King’s Way as staff pastors ever since. But we didn’t know what we were doing.

P3 – Is Lattis the head pastor now?
I – He is. Yeah, Pastor Jack retired and then Lattis took over. He’s our Senior Pastor. And again, the dream of us having this coffee house church when we came back up…they built a gym on the property where the coffee house church…where my dream. I had a vision of where it was gonna be. And there is still another part of the property…

P3 – Maybe you need to visit XXXX. Maybe it’s supposed to be in XXXX. The church there thought about doing it at one time but didn’t get around to doing it. And we’re trying to figure out now what…gotta get out of the mold. The church there is…we’re the youngest people probably in the church. Besides my daughter, we are just about. Everybody is 70-80 years old. We’re down to 20 people maybe. They are moving off…or dying off. And there’s just no young…just very few young people. XXXX is the oldest community in the whole state. The average age is 47.6. So, there’s not many young families, not that many kids. Schools when we moved there nine years ago had 350 kids. Now they are down to 270, K-12…the whole thing. You just can’t get families into churches. None of the churches. We have 5 or 6 churches there…the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Salvation Army, ours, something else…Catholic. All elderly people and very few young families. No youth ministry, teen ministry. We’ve been trying to get teams in to come in…somebody from TGMC to maybe come down…maybe even a couple…to come down to the church. We can give them housing. And start some kind of reaching out to the young people. But we need the young people to do it. They don’t relate to me at almost 60 years old as well as they do someone who’s 25.

I – And that’s what we keep telling…we have only a few young adults at our church. In Eagle River and I keep telling them. They’re all “I think I’m gonna go to another church because we don’t have…” And I say, “No, maybe that’s not what God is asking you to do. How about you talk to your friends. Are you reaching your friends? And then invite them to come. That will build the young adults.”

P3 – We have the same problem. The family that calls us Grandma and Grandpa with their 5 kids, but they moved from our church down to the Salvation Army church because they had at least one other family that had kids, and they were good friends. Their kids did things together, so she moved down there. It ain’t Pentecostal, it’s not the same, the worship’s not the same. She misses all that but there’s something for the kids. We have two or three other 25-30 something families that love God and are great people, but they just don’t see the value of church all the time. They come once in a great while. They’ll get together with other Christian families and do some family outings on Sundays. They call that church or call that worship. And “I don’t want our kids to think God’s only in church.” He’s not but you can talk to them 6 days a week about that other time, but they ought to learn about Christian fellowship together and everything. Can’t seem to get that through their thick heads. We have to love the anyway and wait till God does something. There’s a lot of good people but it just isn’t a priority for the 25-30 somethings anymore…of the few we have in town. The ones that are Christian are mostly of that same mindset. Or they don’t want to commit to one church. They will visit all six churches. We can’t have a youth something going on for your kids when their kids aren’t there. We have lessons
and prepping to be prepared and then they don’t come for 6-8 weeks. Then our teachers are not ready and they get frustrated. That’s the difficult part. But God’s about to do something.

I – Well, we will definitely be praying with you all about that.

P3 – Thank you.

I – And XXXX is one of the only…Isn’t it…you can get there by driving, right?

P3 – The end of the road. It is where the ferry begins.

I – I don’t think we have been there. We might have to take a trip down there. We have an RV that we like to drive around.

P3 – Beautiful place. The mountains are right close. We lived at the border when I worked out there. Beautiful mountains there, 40 miles from town. So, I looked for a house 4 years ago when my daughter was in high school and she was in every activity there was. So, we were driving to town 40 miles every day. Finally bought a house in town. Looked at 16 over about a year and a half before finally I bought one. Toward the end my wife said, “God, if we just have a little peek-a-boo view that would be fine even. Something.” And she said, “I’m just done looking.” And God dropped one in our lap. This one, go look at it because these people…we hadn’t even been thinking of moving and I said we wanna go look at it. Had a beautiful view of the mountains, the harbor’s right there. It’s two houses down from the church. It is so close you’d think it was a church parsonage. Just the perfect house, right price, didn’t need all the…most of them we looked at needed remodeling. Even at $350,000, we would look spending about $30-40,000 on remodeling. Or move this wall or that wall and maybe it would work. This one didn’t need any of that. So, God worked it out. So, if you come down, it’s a beautiful place and you can park right in the yard.

I – Well, XXXX and I are…now that I’m working on my doctorate, all I have left is to write the paper, um and I would love to get even more involved with AKSOM. I’m one of their producers every Saturday, on the first Saturday, whenever they have it. But I would love to travel and go to the different

P3 – places

I – places and different classes.
Appendix H

Interview Transcript, Participant Four

Interviewer (I) – There it goes. Okay, there will be six questions XXXX. So, the first one, um, let me find the question. Tell me how you came to know the lord (Q1).

Participant Four (P4) – Um, first I, first heard the gospel when I was 9 at a vacation Bible school, um, in our town and I always knew, like, who, I always knew about Jesus, but never understood who he was, what he did, and what that meant for me. Um, but that vacation Bible school, it was a Baptist vacation Bible school. I clearly understood the gospel and aske Jesus into my heart. Um, but after that, wasn’t really connected with the church. So I didn’t really understand, like, the personal relationship side of things, XXXX saved and I, but I did, there was like a difference, but um, God continued to pursue me and then in high school I got filled with the Holy Spirit, um, and my friends, family in their living room and then um few years later got um called to go to a discipleship school and within the first month that’s when God called me to ministry in Alaska.

I – Well, that was the next one too.

P4 – Oh!

I – XXXX about your calling to be a pastor (Q2), yeah.

P4 – So, yeah, well I don’t necessarily know what, how, I got uh uh I don’t necessarily, it wasn’t really a calling to be a pastor, it was a, um, God just, ‘cause I had went to this discipleship school,

I – (*acknowledges*)

P4 – Thinking like “I’m gonna do this for one year” and then I had my plan, but then, um. Within the first, I think it was like the first two months, we were on a trip and God just…we were just driving on a road and I was looking out the window. And He was just like, dropped in my heart that I was gonna be, he was gonna to use me for uh discipleship and reaching youth in villages. And he just brought me back to when I was a little girl and going back to the villages to visit my family and my cousins, and just such a need for stability and discipleship. Like, like how, um He would, reminded me of how when I was young, I would, my heart would ache. When I would hear about how things would go in the villages where people would get set free or they would have moves of God or revivals, people throwing away, you know, the stuff that was holding them back like drugs or whatever. I would get so excited, but then a few weeks later, you know, I could call and find out how it was going and find out things just kinda went back to normal. And I like was like my heart would ache for things to be stable and God really drew that connection with the need for discipleship. And, so that’s when I knew that, that was the realm
that God was calling me to. And I just knew, okay I needed to change my plans and I’m…this is what he wants me to do, so, yeah.

I – Good. Uh, tell me about your experiences with AKSOM (Q3).

P4 – Um, I first signed up for AKSOM, 2010, um, I had done up to the licensed to minister. Um, I had done Berean and then, um, just through…as an encouragement and then finally a personal uh realization that I needed to pursue the next level of credentials. Uh, started doing AKSOM, and, the thing that I really appreciated about it, is that, it was uh easily accessible. Like, I didn’t have to call somewhere out of state, uh, to order books, or to, you know, just, you know turn in tests or anything like that. It just seemed very accessible because it was based here in Alaska and it was in Anchorage and I knew the people and it was just easy to uh make those contacts and um. So yeah, I started my courses and I think the thing that helped me in the beginning, ‘cause obviously it’s 2017, so I was like, it took me all that time. But, um, the way that AKSOM is set up with the monthly, uh, courses, you know you, kinda puts you on a schedule where okay, this is the course I’m doing, that the class is at the end of this month. I need to finish this book before that class, do this outline and, um, and then you attend the class and then you take the test. And it just, having that schedule really helped me go through the courses because if it was left up to me, I have never been good at correspondence, even in high school. I tried to do correspondence and I just, I need a schedule. I, I can’t. It’s hard for me to, umm, so that’s why I attended public school, but yeah, that’s one thing that I really was drawn to AKSOM was the accessibility and, um, and once I started doing it, the schedule really helped me get through the courses initially.

I – What do you think about the actual training that it provides (Q3)? You think that its accessible, but what do you think about the training, that the class, what do you think of the classes themselves?

P4 – The classes themselves, like, I really enjoyed, um, the books, that um, that I took um. I liked that I could take the book with me wherever I needed to go. Like, I didn’t have to be in one location, um. And I just remember going through those, like cross cultural ministry, and like the advanced strategic planning one’s. Like, like reading through those like was very enriching and eye opening. And um, yeah, it was definitely…I definitely gleaned a lot from every book like and the yeah, I, yeah, I definitely. I have even passed on some of the books to other people ‘cause I’m like “Wow, this is a really good book.” Like this one lady. She had doubts about the Bible and like one of the courses was Apologetics. Like understanding the different world religions and how the, logically in a way, that is based on fact, like defend the Bible. And um, like that was really good, like all of the courses. I can’t think of one I didn’t really um, that wasn’t enriching in some way, but…

I – And, how has it impacted you personally, and, the churches or villages you interact with (Q4)?
P4 – (mumbles) impacting me personally?

I – Like growth or spiritual growth?

P4 – Oh yeah!

I – or

P4 – Yeah, definitely. I just, yeah, I remember with each course just like a new understanding about just um like doctrine and like having a firm foundation for what you’re um speaking and sharing like just…I just felt like it gave me just strong like um…I guess just like the picture of like a bike. You know, handle bars to grab on to and like um, greater confidence to know like okay this is what you know. I believe this is what I’m sharing with others, like just strengthen my confidence and you know. I just think that sometimes people, or I know I do sometimes think, well you know you kinda have that one not really sure, I don’t, you know like even when you read the Word yourself just you know…It just gave me greater confidence, knowing that “okay” like make sure your rightly dividing the Word of truth, and um, yeah. And there is a lot of practical books, too. Like, I’m just thinking of the cross-cultural ministry and just having, like, different…Just having a view of um, there is just a lot of books that helped me with my view of how I approach ministry how I approach people and um…yeah.

I – That’s good, um, do you feel that, um, you’re adequately prepared for your credentials using AKSOM (Q5)?

P4 – Hmnnnnn, that’s hard for me to…measure because, um, I feel very blessed to have a, um, amazing like spiritual mother and father who just been my mentors even before I like I started um doing AKSOM. And so, I, it’s hard for me to like differentiate, like oh this is what they taught me and this is what I caught by being around them and you know this is what I got from AKSOM. Like, it’s hard to, to differentiate, but I definitely am glad that I went through the courses that, for AKSOM because I, like even just going through the different courses in my mind. Like, those were all very enriching courses and um I don’t regret it, like it was definitely beneficial, so.

I – Okay, have those mentors also, did they guide you towards AKSOM too, or?

P4 – They definitely encouraged me and helped me in it um, it was…I would say it was more of a personal uh decision. Yeah.

I – And, going back to when you were talking about the training it provides, and, so the reason you chose AKSOM was because it was accessible, and you knew the people.

P4 – Yeah, yeah, it was accessible here in Alaska and also it was correspondence as in like I can take the books with me, I don’t have to go to a class at a set location. Even attending the class, all I needed was an Internet connection. And even if I didn’t have an Internet connection, I could
watch the DVD. Like, it’s just, in Alaska that’s just such a perfect model, and I did both. I used Internet and there was sometimes where we were going to be remote and they would send me the DVD, and so.

I – Great.

P4 – Yeah.

I – Uh, last question. How can we, or are there any increments that AKSOM can do to support you better (Q6)?

I – Any changes? Anything that you can see that we might need to do to the class that can help….not just you you know, continuing education after you’re done with Ordination because, you know or uh, not trying to lead you, you know, or are there things we can change at all that will help those coming up that need credentials?

P4 – I know that there is always room to improve, just yeah. I would say, I think one thing that was …hmmm…I think…

I – Again, it’s anonymous so…

P4 – Yeah, I think one thing that um even being here is…uh…getting the word out about AKSOM. Like, if that’s the vehicle, you know for people to, uh, be prepared for ministry. I think the only reason I knew about it was because I went to network conference and I heard it talked about. But, if then, if pastors were talking about it to their congregations but just maybe more intentional promotion. Or like, I mean maybe it’s already happening, but I was just thinking, even since I’ve been hearing of different people that God highlighted of, I know, that expressed like evidence of God’s call on their life, but they haven’t really taken a step towards it. And, don’t even know if they know like ‘are there options to get prepared’ so, then I was thinking, oh I wonder maybe I can mention AKSOM but then I was like I don’t even know if they know what AKSOM is. So, like maybe a promotional campaign or something to get the word out to like hub villages or even strategic villages that don’t have pastors. Like, uh, sending you know, like uh, sending the info or the opportunity and getting it before the people of Alaska that were wanting to be trained or were wanting them to um answer the call of ministry. Let them know like this is a vehicle you can use like just getting the word out I guess.

I – *acknowledges*

P4 – Um, yeah, I think that is really important. ‘Cause if people don’t know that that’s an option, then you know they’re not gonna utilize it.

I – Right.

P4 – But um…
I – Well, thank you. May I call you or email you if I have any follow up questions?

P4 – Yeah.

I – If there is something I have another question about?

P4 – Yeah.

I – Well, thank you. That’s it.

P4 – Thank you.

I – I really appreciate it.
Appendix I

Interview Transcript, Participants Five, Six, and Seven

Interviewer (I) – My lovely assistant, all right, thank you. Ok, so, what we will do is I’ll just ask the question then I will give each of you an opportunity to answer. So, first of all, how did y’all come to know the Lord (Q1)?

Participant Five (P5) – I came to know the Lord when I was fourteen at Wasilla Assembly of God in Wasilla.

I – Cool, yeah.

Participant Six (P6) – Well, one of my earliest memories I was 5 or 6 and my dad asked me if I wanted to ask Jesus into my heart and I said yes, and, ‘cause I’d grown up in a Christian setting. So kinda, just from the first memories I believed in God and Jesus and I just accepted him. I was like 5 or 6 years old.

Participant Seven (P7) – Ditto.

I – Ditto, OK.

P7 – Same family, same kind of circumstances, and about same age probably.

I – What about your callings to be pastors (Q2), in the, where you are now. Or, just as a pastor in general, or missionary in general.

P5 – When I was sixteen, I went to a summer camp at Little Beaver, and I went up for the altar calls and pastor Mark prayed for me and I felt called into missions.

P6 – I got called to ministry when I was 12 at a Kids Adventure camp at camp Li-Wa in Fairbanks, and felt God, and heard God’s voice for one of the first times, and was baptized in the spirit for the first time, speaking in tongues and all that good stuff. And then heard God tell me that I was going to be a musician, a worshipper, a worship leader, and was going to minister in Alaska to young people. And then later on, later in my life, as I got older and that came into more of a focus, I felt God was putting more of like a youth…like to be a youth pastor while I was an MC, using music to reach young people. So, I kinda, I kinda fought a little bit when I was an MC and then I just ended up going with it.

P7 – Master’s Commission for me.

I – So, tell me about your individual experiences with AKSOM (Q3), how you found out about it, and what you think about what it provides for you.
P5 – I first found out about AKSOM when I was in Masters Commission, and then in the program, I actually didn’t get the chance to start it, and so I became an intern with XXXX and XXXX at XXXX in 2014 and I moved up there and started distance courses. So, I didn’t actually attend classes and I didn’t do live stream because we didn’t have the Internet capabilities for that. So, I actually had them on CD’s, and so I would take the course and then watch the video and he would proctor the tests and stuff like that. So, I think AKSOM as a whole an extremely great opportunity, especially if you are going into the missions’ field in Alaska, because it really helps equip, teach you. You can learn as much as you want from the courses, you know you can do the bear minimum and just get through it or whatever and take the tests. But it also gives you the opportunity to go deeper; it really helps you connect on a new level, not just like with knowledge of who God is, knowledge of the Assemblies of God, and really just like learning stuff, but really is like the Holy Spirit is in it. So, you can also grow on a spiritual level and that knowledge level of who God is.

I – Awesome.

P6 – I think that when I started my first year of Master’s Commission in 2009-2010, AKSOM was relatively new, and so it had just been introduced to us. The first year, I did all the CM level and then the next year the Licensing level and then the third year Ordination level. I think it was a total of almost 27 courses and I really enjoyed academics and studies and I really enjoyed the courses that I could. And especially the teachers, the different instructors that we had they just did a phenomenal job with their courses and it was always really fun enlightening time with the courses and that’s, I just, one of my favorite parts of MC were the AKSOM courses.

P7 – I first started, I was introduced to AKSOM through the friends of mine in Master’s Commission because when I had finished my Ordained level courses, I’d done so through Berean Global University. And then after I became the pastor at XXXX, my former crew at Master’s Commission, our old team, had switched over so I, that’s where I first got exposure to it and started helping students through it when I was in town and stuff and all that. I, we began using it up in XXXX probably when XXXX was…when, I think when we first started doing intensive courses with it. We have done a few things. We have seen it shift and it has. I think it has a whole lot of potential I think. I think the district is doing a great job streamlining it and trying to figure out how best to work with us oddball people. And in our situation up in XXXX made it, I think, we made it difficult on AKSOM. You know, just the way we do it, but I think it’s a good thing that we acknowledge these things and get these things ironed out because there are more communities like us then there are like Anchorage and Fairbanks in the state. And so, it’s been ups and downs. It’s been a struggle trying to adapt some of the facets of AKSOM because with logistics and things, can’t fly a teacher out just for one student and then live streaming doesn’t work and this one thing after another that you have to go through. But for the most part, I have seen AKSOM jump through those hurdles to get XXXX her stuff and so we continue to use it and my wife is currently enrolled in it.
I – Awesome. How do you feel it has impacted your spiritual life and also the lives of those you encounter in the village (Q4)?

P5 – It’s really given me tools, it’s really equipped me, because I found myself even going back through AKSOM books because I’ll be like, “I know I read about this in a you know eschatology, I know this.” And then I’d go back and then I will reference it and go, “This is awesome!” So, it definitely equipped me for a lot of stuff in the ministry and spiritually like how I was sharing just a little earlier. It really gives you the opportunity to ask God what He thinks about this area and really just go deeper in prayer and deeper in your relationship with Him.

P6 – There’s a few different courses that I really enjoyed that were highlighted for me, especially for what I am doing up in a native village for youth ministry. There were courses that I took like cross-cultural servanthood, Systematic Theology 1 and 2, and different ones like that that really gave me a more understanding of God’s Word and how to minister and how to, really how to explain the message of God to people in different settings whether it’s, you know, an adult who is very intellectual, a young person who may not have ever heard about God, just a range of talking to different people. And also one of things I really like to do is teach and I like to learn and I like to teach, you know, any kind of academics or classes, courses. I just really have a passion for that and I think that I, like, I took notes during the AKSOM courses obviously, you know. You take a lot of notes and you learn those things, but I think I was also taking notes and watching how the teachers were teaching their styles, their different styles of teaching, how they presented the material, and how they, you know, strategies they used like stories, personal experiences or analogies, and just really took some cues from the different instructors that we had, because they were really passionate, they were really good. I think that, those are a couple of ways that AKSOM impacted me personally.

P7 – Spiritually, I think AKSOM does a great job in causing me to think about why you believe what you believe about it, constructive thinking. I noticed a lot of the questions. I love how the, how the, what are they called, the test questions before you take the test and you take them home

P7 – Text overview, I love how, I see a lot of work has gone into those questions, because it’s not just like, “Okay, you know, find this bolded section in the text”. It asks things like, “How do you think the author perceives this facet of our theology” or something and it’s like it causes you to have to take an entire chapter text and boil it down to an answer and you can’t do that skimming through the book. And so it really causes, whenever you do that you enhance your spiritual armor because you know it gets you thinking about ok what do we believe, why does the Bible say this, and what does it mean for me. That’s why I think AKSOM enhances our spiritual lives.
I – Why, you, you may have already answered this, but **why did you choose AKSOM specifically instead of Berean or another program (Q5b)?**

P7 – Be honest.

I – Be honest *laughter* again anonymous.

P5 – Well actually, it’s hard to do ‘cause I heard about Berean and I heard about Global and I looked at some of their textbooks and stuff. I helped go through the campus when everything was boiling down and getting liquidated, and basically I had a desire to do Alaska School of Ministry because I was called to Alaska and because I know the hearts of the pastors and the different people picking the curriculums and who are formulating like you know this is our vision. And even though it was pretty new, I just really felt that, it’s almost like instead of going to Walmart you go to a home market where people are like, “Oh yeah I picked this fresh”. It’s like people from Alaska sowing into Alaska.

P6 – Well for me, I, I don’t…if I necessarily like, specifically chose AKSOM because as I went into MC I

I – It was chosen for you.

P6 – Yeah, I didn’t know what I would be doing academic wise, I just knew I would be doing something and they introduced AKSOM and said this, you know, we’re gonna go through this for academics and I was like, “Okay”. You know, I just rolled with it. But, as like I got to know the different instructors that we had and just the courses and then also, you know, as I got a more of an understanding of, you know, I got called to Alaska…I love Alaska, I love the Alaska Ministry Network, and how, seeing how AKSOM was partnered with the network you know is like…anything that the network is doing that they want you know they wanna like, see it happen, I’m on board with it and I kinda invested more. I guess I took more of a personal ownership of it ‘cause this is, this is ours, this is Alaska’s. And so was like, I wanna go with this, that’s like, not that though like Berean or Global, like different universities and stuff. It’s like not that it’s bad or anything, but it’s like out of state and I wanted to do. I wanted to stay where I was like, you know, here. I think that is why I invested more here.

P7 – And they were both cool just doing this *laughter*

P5 – Yeah, and he was just there.

P6 – But it was more of a personal, “Yeah I’m on board with this”.

P7 – For me, as the pastor, and choosing the curriculum and having to decide what we are going to do, it really boiled down to, I was new to AKSOM. I hadn’t personally taken it yet, but I helped students through it and I kinda got a feel for it. I knew XXXX pretty well and we have a great relationship, so I was behind him. And we just had a like horrible experience with Global.
We had, I heard things have changed now, we have had distance learning through them had been such an administrative snafu. It was like they, trying to get courses done we had a student wait three weeks to get their little turn-in thing evaluated before he could take the test. And so we were looking at a month or two month turnarounds on courses, and it’s like at this rate you are at 3 years before you get certified. And so…and then AKSOM was there saying hey, we just called up XXXX and fixed everything. And so, I was like, that is what really drew me to it is that relationship that we have with our, yeah.

I – Awesome. So, last question. And once again honesty and anonymous here. How can we better support you? What are some, is there anything we can add or change or what can we do through AKSOM to better support you (Q6)?

P7 – You can say pass if you want to.

P5 – I was just thinking that, can you come back to me.

I – Of course.

P6 – I finished my courses before…

P7 – Yeah.

P6 – I was finished by the time, I was finished before I went into the village. I just had to finish my internship that I had to do which was pretty easy.

I – Well from a teacher perspective, what else could we do to support you if you are going to teach people AKSOM? Think on that, okay, your turn.

P7 – I think from a, several different viewpoints, I love the curriculum. I love the, like I said before, I love how they engage the students. I love the classes, the teaching. Administratively has been our biggest problem. Just with the short staff and the recent transition from XXXX to XXXX and XXXX carrying so much and then when he was basically, my experience is when XXXX left the office, AKSOM doesn’t exist. I mean, if you do get someone on the phone, it’s on Tuesday between the hours of 1:15 and 1:47 and when you get a hold of somebody they don’t know how to answer any of my questions because XXXX, no XXXX, no XXXX can roll that in and he’s out in XXXX and for the next couple of, for a week or whatever. And my thing logistically, it was really tough. And administratively, we would…billing was a trouble, ‘cause we were all part…we were under the old…we were under when billing was in AKSOM and it wasn’t really connected through, you know, XXXX or anybody our bill was in-house completely. And it was one of those things where you know you would order your box of courses and you would say in all bold text in the email, “I need no books. We have done these courses with three other students and we have three copies of these textbooks. Please don’t send us any books, don’t bill us for any books, and we just need the text overviews.” And you get a box all books and shipping 29 dollars. “Here’s your charge for all these books” and it takes three
months to get those books taken of the charge and get them sent back and all that, and that was not a one-time thing. I think 9 out of 10 orders made through AKSOM were like that. Academically, excellent it did great for us. Administratively, I see that their, that’s why I say the district is doing well because I see that they are putting more people in the office there putting you know more resources there and trying to stream line that and we would go through. And just XXXX, we would go through 4 or 5 different types of administration types of things, so when we first started it was she has to fly to town to go to class, then it was, “Well, wait we can send you a video”. But then, “We can’t send you the video until after she’s done with the text overview and when we have the text overview, we will release the video, then we are looking at 2 weeks shipping times or something. Then okay, we can send you the video when we send it altogether, we will send the text overview the text book and the video and then will send it. But only one class at a time. And I had her on a 6 to 8-hour academic schedule. So in a week, she’d done the class. She’d read the text book and everything was just standard but they weren’t used to people going that fast. So then it’s like I want 3 courses at a time, “Can’t be done,” but then “Ok we can do that, but she has to test on this and you proctor it.” And then “You can test online,” but then I’ll order the next course and you have to, “Here’s the test and fill it out.” What ever happened to online testing? “We don’t do that anymore” and it’s like. That, administrative was our big jungle, but so if anything and I see the district already doing that, but that would be my thing as a pastor. There has been times where it literally caused me to want to go back to Berean. It has caused some headaches from the pastoral side to the point where I spent whole days in the office. A whole day of my time trying to figure out what in the world is going on, and so there had been times where, yeah, wait three weeks to get a course done but at least it’s a professional institution. And when I call Berean, I, you know…so there…so we are sticking with AKSOM and we have come full circle saying “Ok we need to do this.” Like Pastor XXXX said, we want to support our district and that’s why I’m really encouraged when I hear things from the stage and from you guys saying “We are investing into the administrative side of things, we are trying to make this better.” so that’s one of the things that keeps me going with AKSOM.

P6 – Yeah, I did all that like the, just flexibility in the administration and just, also I don’t know if, I’m not sure is AKSOM like if you take AKSOM like all the courses and stuff are those credits counts as credits now for AG universities.

P7 – No

I – Only with Northwest.

P6 – Only with Northwest, ok so.

I – And not credit for credit either.

P7 – It’s kinda like what Global does with Berean. I think all the sixteen colleges recognize Berean but as until AKSOM and Northwest, none of them recognized DSOM. Like they
wouldn’t recognize DSOM courses only Global, only Berean. So now, AKSOM is like Berean was with all the colleges, but only with Northwest.

P6 – Okay, so maybe if there was like a way to…

P7 – Expand that.

P6 – Look into that or whatever because I saw that the Northwest just did that thing where they could transfer up to 30 credits. I put in the transcript for all 27 or all of every AKSOM course for all 3 levels of credential. I had my full transcript copy sent to SAGU and they couldn’t transfer anything. And I was like, I had to take a bunch of Bible courses. A lot of the textbooks were the same textbooks and I did the course and I was like…

P7 – Same course.

P6 – I know it’s like a breeze. I just breezed through it. I was like, I took this course in AKSOM I remember this stuff.

P7 – And he did distance learning through SAGU, too.

P6 – Yeah, but I was like that would have saved a lot of credit hours and maybe if AKSOM, I don’t know, maybe I don’t know if it’s on their scope to do that, to make it so that they can have credit or be accredited with AG universities.

P7 – Not fully accredited but if Northwest can recognize it…

P6 – Yeah, make it where the other AG universities recognize it like SAGU or Southeastern and stuff like that.

I – And since I’m attending Southeastern…

P6 – Oh.

P7 – Southeastern, yeah.

I – I will talk to them about that.

P7 – The accreditation things is always confusing but it, like we said, Northwest is doing it so there is no way another college can’t recognize it.

P6 – Yeah, if it’s the same text books your using and the instructors are high level

P7 – Doctors

P6 – It’s like, why doesn’t it count.

P6 – Yeah, when some them have doctorates.
I – And Northwest only counts them though.

P7 – Extra credit?

I – Not extra credit.

P6 – Oh, like electives.

P7 – Electives.

I – Electives.

P6 – They count them as electives, ok, with my degree I only need 12 hours of electives.

P7 – That’s what he’s left with.

P6 – Yeah, 18 wouldn’t yeah.

P7 – Basically, if they would have recognized even like 6 or 8 hours of it he would have saved like 1800 dollars on his degree.

I – How about you? Did you think of anything?

P5 – I guess it just goes with the administrative side was really good cause I, all I did was mention I wanted to start ordination courses and then I was billed and signed up for a class I couldn’t fly in for. And then I got an email saying I missed the class. I was like, I didn’t take the class, I didn’t sign up for the class, but yeah so definitely the administrative side. It is really cool that you are working towards that. I love all the courses, but I would love to see more stuff about Alaska. Like they were talking about Mission Accomplished, really boots on the ground ministry you know, ‘cause it’s an Alaskan school.

P7 – If we had like an Alaska home missions class with Jack Aiken’s new book.

P5 – Yeah that.

P7 – Either that or a practical, like call it Alaska missions planning.

P6 – Practical Alaskan missions trips.

P7 – Like Mission Accomplished. Or what I would love to see is, academically, I like, in a week start classes with SAGU. XXXX pretty much told me I could do it for free and my thing is, I’ve been waiting ten years as a pastor up there. And when I left Master’s, I had everything up to Ordained as well. And when I looked into the courses, when I went to sign XXXX up, I thought, I was always looking for something to, you know, challenge myself and grow. As of currently, there’s only what two? Two or four continued education courses for pastors who are already ordained. And like, those are really designed for church like entry level, you know, like village
Bible training type courses. But in terms of Pastors who are in the field, ordained, maybe some who do or don’t have the degree, continuing education, kinda like…

P6 – Like a higher course.

P7 – Any kind of…I would enroll into AKSOM if they had a course that was like for pastors who are already in the field called like…developing your team or something. And they had it for pastors and only, you had to be a pastor to sign up or whatever. And it was from our district teaching pastors. Some tips like XXXX or somebody teaching it. If XXXX was teaching a course on anything like pastor leadership, I would guarantee you everyone in that room would sign up.

I – Did you guys have anything else you wanted to add?

P7 – No

I – My last question, may I call you or email you

P5, 6, 7 – *acknowledges*

I – If I need any further questions

P7 – Absolutely.

I – All right, well thank you that’s it

P7 – Thank you. I appreciate what you are doing

I – You guys are awesome, see I told you it would be painless.
Interview Transcript, Participant Eight

Interviewer (I) – If you don’t mind we will go ahead and start so I can get you guys on your way. We will be praying for your, the, you said you were going to visit somebody in the hospital, so we will be praying for them as well. Alright, so let’s go ahead and get started. First thing, thank you again for doing this for me. Tell how you came to know the Lord (Q1).

I – You can pick who goes first, yes, how did you come to know the Lord?

Participant 8 (P8) – Would you like to go first?

Participant P8 Spouse – No, go ahead.

P8 – I was raised in the a…the Bible belt, in Mississippi. I would say at age 6 I actually understood prayer and praying and about Jesus, because my mom. She had been a drinker, as long as I can remember, and I had developed a kidney issue. I was urinating blood and she went to the hospital and the doctor told her that I shouldn’t be alive, and at any time that I could pass. I remember her, she don’t know that I’m aware of it, but I remember her praying over my bed, “Lord if you would just save my baby, I will change and I will follow you”. And he saved me, she served the Lord for the next 57 years. It was kinda a poplar church, so at 12, you have kind of an age thing down there where if you were able to understand about Jesus, they actually put you on what they call the mourners bench so that she might receive Christ and accept Him. At age 12 I did. And that started me on my path. I was so excited about Jesus that I would take my Bible to school at 12 years old and get beat up a lot. Get beat up quite often. But followed the Lord that way and through the years. As I grew up, as I got into my teenage years, kinda fall away and come back and fall away and come back. So, I had in my younger adult years, I kinda got into a whole bunch of different things: drugs, alcohol, the whole nine yards, the whole gamut. And was married before, had a wife before her that passed away from a chronic illness and had 5 children. Had knew the Lord back in my earlier years, so I was sitting one day in my living room and I was trying to decide to quit smoking weed or go to buy food. And I’m sitting there looking at my kids pass by and they’re not eating and here I’m thinking about weed. And I asked Jesus then, “Well, if this be you, take this away from me.” And He did. He took it away. But that still had not got me to follow Christ 100% so again, without a job with 5 kids to raise, sitting in a house thinking about committing suicide. And had the gun and everything but the kids would keep walking by and keep walking by. Every time I would think I’m gonna do something, walking by…walking by. And all of a sudden it donnéd on me, “What would happen to them if I wasn’t around?” They were struggling now but they would really be struggling without me, so I just cried out to Jesus to come back in my life. That started this path now to where I have stuck with Jesus and I believe this was back in probably, more or less 2006 is when
I started on that journey. Been going...Because most people say “Well this was the defining moment,” but we have a defining moment, but it’s where it’s stopping sin...it didn’t necessarily stop there. So that’s what I’m saying. That’s about 2006 is where I actually took it and myself to the Lord. It wasn’t that I didn’t know Him, it was just coming back again to follow Him. Ever since then, I’ve been following the Lord and in 2011 I was asked to...surprisingly...asked to be the pastor of the church. And thought it was a joke. Literally. We laughed at the Bishop. I thought he was joking because I never saw myself as that and in that way. And once again I had to give my testimony. He said you have been called and that in that calling He really wants you to speak for the Lord. I waited about 9 months to make that decision but I went ahead and said yes to the Lord. Since then, I’ve been working on my credentials. I’m now licensed and hope to be Ordained next year.

I – Wonderful. How about you?

Spouse – Well, it was...I went to an Episcopal church. Started out in Episcopal church. We were diligently going to church every Sunday, every time the doors were open. And we had to be in church. I turned about 12 years old and was kind of curious to see what the other churches had to offer so I went to evening service and there they were having baptism and with XXXX. I walked in and I felt a presence, something different. There was something different there. I just started weeping and I wept through the whole service, not even knowing what it was about. After a while, after baptism, XXXX explained what it was. It was the Holy Spirit that just...that was in the house and He’d grab a hold of you. That night I accepted the Lord as my personal Savior and that’s how I got to know about Jesus.

I – We are going to move to the AKSOM questions now. What have been your experiences (Q3)...well first, why did you choose AKSOM?

P8 – I chose AKSOM because it was the…I don’t want to say the easiest or convenient path, well I guess it was for the most part. It was most convenient. It was one of those things where I was working, schooling, and trying to basically pastor a church so to try to leave and go to college, that wasn’t gonna work. So it was the most convenient and available.

I – Have you been taking any of them too?

Spouse – I have taken several classes with my husband and the Assembly of God had something to offer us and so we took that initiative to take those classes so that’s why we took that course of going with Alaska (AKSOM).

I – What have your experiences been with AKSOM? What do you think of the training it has provided (Q3)?

P8 – A lot of information and I’m thankful that God’s involved in it because I sometimes...it was things that I went through that I shouldn’t have known but I do. I’ve retained it and I don’t
know how I retained it to this day. It could only been of God. But it was stuff that...the classes
that I took were questions, a lot of them were questions that I had I just didn’t know how to ask
them. So, it actually helped me understand the questions and he would answer them for me.
Quite beneficial...the learning and learning how to look at the Bible and how to go back and
research and to actually find out things. And so it gave me an opportunity where I had to sit
down and actually had to study so it kind of prompted me a little bit more than just reading the
Bible. While reading the Bible is good in itself, really finding a way of understanding was better
because they would ask questions in a whole different way than I would think to ask, and it gave
me more insight.

Spouse – Could you read that question again?

I – Sure. What is your experience with AKSOM? What did you think about the training (Q3)?

Spouse – We’ve had wonderful teachers that came out, mentors that really elaborated on what
their presentations were. They were excellent blessings that each teacher taught.

P8 – Very knowledgeable.

Spouse – And they were consistent. It’s real important to have the same teachers so that was
really important to be consistent in your teachers. Because you get to know them and have a
closer relationship with them. You are open with them and you don’t hold back any questions
you may have in your heart. Although I didn’t take many of the tests, but the few I did take, they
were encouraging. They didn’t hold back anything that they needed to teach us.

I – How do you feel AKSOM has impacted your life, if it has, and how has it also impacted your
church and maybe village life (Q4)?

P8 – Let’s see, my life, a greater understanding...understanding of the Word, how to apply it.
The church, some of the church members took some of the classes too. And I believe it gave
them a different viewpoint, outlook, to see through a different person, a different prism. It opens
your mind up, so I think the church benefitted from it.

Spouse – He benefited from it because I, we have these deeper questions that, you know we
don’t have anybody to help us out there. And if it wasn’t for them, we wouldn’t have gained this
knowledge that we now have that we can forward to the people in the community.

I – Do you feel that, or how has AKSOM prepared you for the credentials (Q5)? Do you feel like
you are well prepared for the credentials you are earning?

P8 – I don’t know how you would say that. I don’t think I will ever be prepared, so I think that
is kind of a trick question. It gives me more understanding, gives me more knowledge, but I will
never stop learning. That is going to be a process that continues, so I, we feel confident that I am
doing what I need to do, what I’m called to do.
Spouse – And I’m sure if I followed through on with all the studies that my husband’s gone through and, I’m sure I’ve gained, it would be beneficial for me. But I’m sure it would prepare me well for whatever they had offered us to learn and what we need to focus on. I’m sure it has. It has my husband, he’s such an intelligent man. He can pick up anything, read something, remembers. A wonderful memory. Me, I’m probably the opposite. I have to read it over and over that’s why…you know both of our jobs, we have really important jobs in the community and if we put 100% in this and to our studies, I think it would be awesome. We have other responsibilities that we have to take care of that we don’t…I myself don’t put 100% into that program.

I – I know I’m not supposed to talk but remember, as you read in those books, you are putting His Word in your heart and it is not going to return void. He is going to bring that back to your memory. Last question about AKSOM: What can we do in AKSOM to better support you? Is there anything we can do better or things we can do to help you (Q6)?

P8 – Actually, they did real well. At first I would have said they pushed me a little too much. But if they hadn’t pushed me, I wouldn’t be where I am now. So it was a good thing. He could…but I think they already do this…I think they take the culture and people’s occupations and other things into account, but the thing of it is that life always happens and kind of changes us. They were flexible so actually it was good for me. There was one time I was saying why is it back to back to back, it was really pretty quick but it was one of those things where I’m glad I didn’t have a lot of down time to not really kind of allow things to go out of my head. So it worked out fine. I could tell they were very flexible. And when they would come they would always ask me and I would set the schedule. And that was the thing. I would set the schedule and then life would happen and that would get in the way, so I would have to either put it back or…so or something was going on so it was like they were really putting pressure on me but they really weren’t. So to me, I don’t see a lot that AKSOM can do other than, like she was saying, you get to know your instructors and you get to get a sense of understanding from them. We had a few different ones and each taught differently, but it’s one of those things when you get an instructor that you learn from. Brother XXXX, I mean, was just excellent in his teaching and how he would convey things. And I’m sitting there going, “Wow, I never read it that way. I never saw it that way.” So, it all worked good for me and I just think that, like she was saying the consistency in instructors if that could happen and the flexibility. If that continues to happen I think that’s going to be great.

I – How about you? Can you think of anything else?

Spouse – Well, I know there’s many long distance courses that are going on today and if they, if the young folks aren’t able to have access to that or could have access to that, I think that would be another avenue that they can take and that could probably save them money for the district itself or the network itself. But I myself would personally like to have face-to-face instruction.
That’s the best way to learn. I’m a kinesthetic learner. I have to see it so I’m glad they have that in the villages instead of via teleconference.

P8 – And we have simulcast. I think they even simulcast from XXXX, I believe so if I’m not mistaken. Yeah.

Spouse – Yeah, they did.

P8 – Yeah, it worked good.

I – Well, two more questions. Do you mind if after, you know, when I start doing the transcripts, if I have another question, do you mind if I email or call you? Would that be ok?

P8 – You have my number

Spouse – Don’t mind at all.

I – And then, the last question is how did you get to XXXX? Because I am sure that was a bit of a change from, because you said you were from North Carolina, right?

P8 – Mississippi

I – Mississippi. OK. How did you get to Alaska? And tell me about the culture change.

P8 – Well, I came from Mississippi off of a farm. I came from off of a farm, so it was just wide open, nothing but cotton fields, corn fields. That’s it and just hot. I grew up in the 60s so I chopped cotton, picked cotton, the whole 9 yards. So, it was one of those things where I had been told that by a friend of ours that, who I thought was a friend of mine, “You won’t amount to anything, you won’t be any good for anything. And I had dropped out of school. That really broke my heart. And then one day a fellow came up and said that my brother wanted to get himself to Alaska because he was afraid of flying. And he said, “If you go with me, I’ll buy your ticket. I was 17 years old. So, I had dropped out of school, no potential for other than the farm and saw a 73-year-old man driving a tractor and bouncing up and down and I’m going “No”, something said, “That’s you.” And I’m all, “No.” So, the next day, I mean literally the next day after the fellow told me, I was on a plane. I was in Fairbanks. And had family in Fairbanks and lived there with them for 8 months. Joined the military. Went back down. Met my first wife and couldn’t get work in Fairbanks and she said, “well there’s work in XXXX.” And at that time I was looking for finances to be able to send back home because the family was really struggling down. I had parent that were both, they couldn’t read or write, the elderly people and they didn’t have much so I thought I was trying to make money to send home. So, she said, “Go visit with me in XXXX, see how you like it for a while.” So, I got to XXXX. That’s where I’ve been. In 86 she passed away and met this young lady, beautiful young lady. And we’ve both changed each other quite a bit for the Lord. Just got with Jesus and that’s created our family and just went from there. Thirty-six years later, I’m still there.
I – Wow. How hard was it back then to adapt to the village life compared to…

P8 – Well my, I came off the farm so being in a small place, the only difference was the heat and the trees. Because we subsisted too, we lived off the farm. Everything we ate basically came from the woods, the farm, or the creeks or whatnot so we basically lived the way they lived. And plus, I’d been military, so I had discipline in my life, so I wasn’t very much afraid of anything. So, if you came after me, I went back after you. So really, it was hard but no harder than down home. No harder than down home to me. So, I adapted, changed, and I grew with it. After people got to know me, it got better with time but it’s just like moving anywhere new. Not really that big of a deal. People think…to me it wasn’t that big of a deal. I went through some issues but I had just as bad issues down home so it’s like it wasn’t that big of a deal to me.

I – Do you guys have anything else you want to add?

P8 – Well, I’d like to say that Pastor XXXX was my mentor. And he saw something that, I don’t know how he saw it or where he got it from. And he had kept saying, and basically to me southern hospitality is you see an elderly man that’s not, he’s eating boxed lunches as he called it, little microwave stuff and I, to me, I’m one of those…if my dad, I hope someone would bring him a meal. So, I started bringing him a meal. And we had men’s night and the men would forget so I’d always call the men and he would say I have the heart of a pastor. And I’m off and I’m thinking, “I don’t know why you are saying that.” And bring him a meal and he’d keep saying, “You have the heart of a servant.” And I didn’t pay him any attention. And then this lady came into town and preached about a month. She watched the church for Pastor XXXX. And she prophesied over me, which again I blew that off. “Get outta here.” And she said, “Next year this time,” she said, “You stay close to Him. Next year this time, you’ll be in this position.” And of course, I went, “Uh huh.” I’m waiting for him to come back, waiting for him to come back. And these things fell into place. When Pastor XXXX was my mentor, I believe the Lord prepared Him to prepare me for that season. And it opened up the door. As you can see, we’re still running around and he’s still teaching, so without him, having seen something in me, suggesting that I become a pastor, I don’t see it happening. I would have enjoyed myself going to church and that would have been just fine.

Spouse – I just want to thank Alaskom (AKSOM) for the opportunity to take, give those courses to us therefore or else we wouldn’t be here today to be able to be witnesses for the Lord. We thank them.

I – Thank you very much. And thank you for your service.

P8 – Thank you. And Brother XXXX is bottom line, he’s my teacher. I gotta admit, that’s the one that really moved me forward going to school or I’d probably, he was still on my back. And without AKSOM, I wouldn’t have been able to do this.

I – Thank you for what you guys do out there at XXXX. We appreciate it. And God bless you.
Appendix K

**Interview Transcript, Participant Nine**

Interviewer (I) – My first question is **tell me how you came to know the Lord** (Q1).

Participant 9 (P9) – I came to know the Lord through XXXX and XXXX XXXX. They were missionaries and they had an event with a special speaker speaking and, I didn’t know this, I didn’t know it was… I was looking for my girlfriend and when I went to her place, she wasn’t there and her family told me that she’s at church. So, finally I was on my way home. I had no intention of going to the church. But, I take it back, before that happened, I had invited a friend and we got so bombed up, knowing that there was a revival. And we were going to get so bombed out and we went to church and I remember when we went in the place was so packed. And when I looked at the crowd and there, there was a real experience of joy. And that was something that I didn’t have. And there was a person that turned around that I didn’t even know that person that had a vision of me coming to that service that night. And there was a chair there at the entrance by the bathroom and I was sitting there and my friend was sitting beside me. And the evangelist was preaching and I was convicted. And I was… I didn’t like what he was saying because he exposed…it seemed like he exposed my life. And I was about to get up in front of all the crowd. I was going to go up and punch him in the face but there was a big hand that put its hand right on top of my head and prevented me from getting up. But when I turned to friend, and said, “Let’s go,” that hand lifted. And we went out and when we came out of that place, when it was over, I turned to my friend. It was like we didn’t smoke marijuana and we didn’t drink any homebrew. And I noticed we were sober and I finally said to him, “Boy that’s some preacher.” And he said, “Yeah.” And so, I forgot all about it and the next day I wasn’t even thinking about it and going back and that’s when I went looking for my girlfriend and she wasn’t there. And finally, I found that she was at church and I had no intention of going… going back to church… but when I passed that place it was a magnet. It was like a magnet and I passed the church and I went over to drop something off or pick something up at my dad’s place and I had to go back. And when I went back I went in and that man, that same man, was preaching and he, just within 5 minutes that there was an altar call that, like he was making. And when I came in and it was like the end of the message and he was doing an invitation for anyone to accept Jesus as their personal savior. And the Spirit of God, when It spoke to my spirit, and said I may never ever come to this line… I may never come to this line. And then when the invitation was given, I remember I was about to go. I zipped one of my sides and it was like a dark force and a gentle voice. And it was like a tug-of-war. And, a tug-of-war because I was so filled with sin, led a life of sin, and I really felt the spiritual forces between the light and darkness. And the voice I heard from the dark was mean. And I remember zipping my one side and zipped my other coverall on my left side and the man was gently asking people to come forward. And I felt like I may never come to line, if I don’t, then I may never ever come to this line. That is what I felt in my spirit.
And so, I decided, once I made that little step, there were two persons beside me, invisible, probably angels. I remember they had their hands under this arm and this arm and people didn’t see it. And I went up to that evangelist and there were two or three other missionaries that were there and I said, “I don’t know how to pray.” And they said, “Just follow, we’ll help you pray.” And so, whatever they said, I repeated what they said. And after I had repented and confessed all my sins, and when I opened my eyes, everybody was gone. All the people had gone across the building and the missionaries they said, “Go across and have fellowship. Have coffee and cookies.” And I said, OK. You know, I didn’t feel…it was just by faith that I invited Jesus in. He took my place. And so, I listened. I was going across to the building and just as I was going to go in, the Holy Spirit told me to go see my friend. And Harold was the guy that I had just smoked with. And I went to church and invited Christ into my life and I was told to go see him. And so, I went. I went over to see him, and it was because I had one joint left in my pocket and he was alone. He had a wood stove and I told him that I had accepted Jesus as my personal Savior. And I took that joint and I went over to his wooden stove and I lifted it, threw it in, and closed it. And then I left. I wanted to go back to the fellowship. And it was like 11…probably after 12:00 in the morning and there were lots of people there in the fellowship room, where John and Lois lived in their trailer, in the kitchen, in the addition on the side. When I got there, I looked through the window and I could see them laughing and I could hear them and everything. I was nearing the porch and I was just going to open the door when the Holy Spirit said for me to go home. I didn’t even go in yet and I said, OK. So, I went home. The reason why I was sent home is because I was a night person and I never liked to sleep in the night, only during the day because there were demons that wanted to take possession of my body. And I would fight it. I never told my parents or my friends about the kind of struggle I had. I struggled with the dark forces that wanted to take possession of my body. In the mornings, I would sleep and I would sleep peacefully. And so, when I got home, I remember what my mother said. She said, how come I’m home so early. She was in the back and I said, I was just going to go to bed. I went into my room. I had a spring bed with a quarter inch plywood with maybe a not very thick mattress. And I had a pillow and a blanket. I laid there and you know how the spring beds sound. And I laid there and I crossed my hands like this and I laid my head down on the pillow. As soon as my head just sunk like that, I was out. I have never slept so deep and so peacefully. And when I got up that morning, I was the same way. I did not move. I must have slept, sleeping that way. My body was straight sideways. And when I woke up, my eyes…I didn’t dare move my body…when I saw the colors in my room, and the details, the lines, the lights were on. It was like I was soaking in the colors and everything was coming towards me. And I got up and it was beautiful, beautiful outside. My parents were still asleep. And the praises came out of my mouth and you know, from darkness to light. I was a man, my mouth was just full of filth. I didn’t care to tear people down publicly. And that day, I was saying, “Praise the Lord,” and “Hallelujah!” And I was wondering what was going on with me. You know and it was so beautiful outside and I looked out through the window there was another person that was walking. And I ran out and I jumped over the rail and he probably thought I was crazy cuz I
jumped over the rail and maybe it was 6 feet up in the air. I jumped over the rail and it was about 7 or 8 feet up and I ran towards him. And I remember grabbing him. You know, I don’t know who that person was…I can’t, for some reason I can’t remember who it was, maybe because I was so excited…and I took that person by the shoulder and I said, “Jesus loves you.” And that’s all I said and I let go and I went back. From then on, I’ve never touched drugs and alcohol…I was totally delivered. Amen. So that’s how I got saved. It was an evangelist. He had a shaky voice. He was, I think, Inupiaq evangelist. But the way he preached really convinced me and convicted me and thank God I didn’t go. The angels prevented me from doing harm to him in public. But I didn’t tell anyone how there was a big hand on my head that held me on the chair. I didn’t know God had placed a burden on this one person and he had a vision of me coming forward til after I got saved. And they say that I…my hair was long and my complexion…because I sleep during the day and be awake in the night…that under my eyes they were black and my complexion was white. And underneath my eyes were kind of shady black and I was a night person. So that’s how I got saved.

I – Wonderful. Well, how did you become…what was your calling to become a pastor (Q2)? What was that moment?

P9 – When…after I got saved, I was encouraged to go to Bible school and I said, “I can’t. I don’t need to go to Bible School.” Until I received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, I wanted what I saw. People being so filled with God’s Spirit, so full of joy and boldness. And that night, in the summertime, I was seeking the Lord and it was getting towards fall time, you know, and they were wanting me to go to Bethel Bible Training School in Bethel. And I received a letter and I remember I was out at the end of the airport, down on my knees, in the grass, where nobody could see me. And I was out there where there was no people or nothing and right by a stream…a little creek…and I was crying out to God and He said, “Feed my sheep.” And it was so clear, so still, so powerful. And that’s how I received my calling. I got filled with the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. It was just…things were happening. You know, after completing Bethel Bible Training School, and that school got transferred over to Anchorage and was renamed. XXXX, he wanted for us to try to find a name for the Bible college here, and you know what happened here in Anchorage, and I wrote down Far North Bible College and that’s how that name came about…Far North Bible College. And I went to Far North Bible College the second year, no…Bethel Bible Training school offered just a semester two months and then in January and February…just two, two…and then we went to Far North Bible College for four months.

I – How did you get to AKSOM?

P9 – AKSOM is when I had completed my education, my Bible education. After the Far North Bible College, I went to American Indian Bible Institute before it became American Indian College. And for the last year it became American Indian College. And I was there for four years. And the fifth year I came back to my work to pay off my bill for school, my school bill.
And I worked the whole year. And at the same time, I was the president of the mission for the college. That was something too. Having a little group going out to different villages and raising up money. And it was a learning experience. When I came back, I remember when they had the first AKSOM classes. We had like two or three from our church and not only that but combining XXXX. XXXX at that time the Assembly of God in XXXX, that’s where AKSOM class was held. And that was when XXXX was pastoring there. And we had AKSOM class came to the villages and I really liked it because, you know, knowing that it costs a lot to travel and to pay for tuition, you know, to be there and to have AKSOM in the village and having...like XXXX was like a hot place where Kotlik, Nunam Iqua, and Alakanuk come together and be a part of AKSOM. And we had good fellowship. I enjoyed the fellowship before the lesson gets started and after the lesson gets started. And we were able to ask a lot of questions and hearing how others interacting with teachers, just like in college you know how students come together in the cafeteria or at chapel. You get to talk. But here it’s with a teacher that would take that time to get, to clarify, because a lot of our people, we know what it’s like to have a different spirit, spirit from the world and Shamanism and knowing that resisting the evil spirit how they want to take possession and that they would...My dad, thank God, thank God that we were able to, I don’t know, in my family our dad didn’t allow us to do the Native dance. I didn’t understand that, you know, and even my mother, my mother was a dancer but my dad wasn’t. He quit. But anyway, it was nice. It was nice to have our brothers and sisters to be at their level, to be at the class, to be at the same table, and to have the teacher expound and teach us. And to become submissive to God’s Spirit. Like we would learn to listen and that’s what God wants us to do for now to be students, that we need to be submissive to God’s Word, and listen to what others are experiencing. And to have a screen and to hear other villagers. You know that really strengthened our faith that we’re not the only ones. You know, sometimes the enemy tries to box us in to believe that we must be the only ones that are going through trials and hardship. And for some of us it is financial difficulty and there’s hardly any work for them to do. And only the summertime is the time to do all you can to make money or go to college or vocation school. But I remember I wanted to make as much as I could when I was about to go to college in Arizona. I had to work with my uncle as a fisherman, as a helper. And when that was over, I was on my way. A little over $2000, and then when I got to Bethel, the guy that was sitting behind me when I realized my money, my wallet was missing, and when we were at Bethel airport I was going to try to track down that person that was behind me and he just got in the cab and took off. And I didn’t know who that person was. And then I remember I went to Bethel Assembly of God. We didn’t have cell phones and I had to use their phone to contact XXXX, another missionary at XXXX and XXXX’s place. I said, “I guess I’ll have to go back. Somebody took my wallet.” And I was going to. I thought I was going to go home and then he said for me to spend one night. And I didn’t know he had called all the churches in Anchorage. They pulled in all the money and paid my fare to Arizona. And when I got to Arizona, I thought I’d get some new clothes and stuff, but there was a big garage in Arizona at AIBI Bible Institute. That old man that was in charge of the garage, he tapped me and said, “I think I have a pair of,
suit for you that would fit you. So he brought me down to the garage and when I got down there, I went inside the building and it was so huge…filled with beds, mattresses, all kinds of things in there. I waited for him and when he came out he had a golden suit and a blue suit. He said, “I think these two will fit you.” And so I took those and sure enough they fit me just right. It felt kind of awkward to me to wear a suit. But, you know, it was just, everything was so different. That first year I really had to depend on God for everything. He clothed me, and paid my way, and even after the corp rates because my schooling was good that they were giving me money and just going over and coming home for Christmas and go back, it was good. It was so good. And He provided everything. It’s just amazing. There’s a lot of things I can tell you about miracles and things happening.

I – So what do you think about the training that AKSOM has provided (Q3)? Like the curriculum, and things like that. What do you think about the AKSOM training that you got?

P9 – There at the time before I became a minister, this man he, you know, to get his certification, he, there were certain classes that they provide for certification, license, and for ordination. And tests. And for him to do that in, within two years, and how accessible it was for him, I saw that and I’ve been a part with him to encourage him and to be a part. And I was taking the classes even though I had taken it and I wanted to encourage him with that. And he’s now the pastor of XXXX Assembly of God in XXXX. And his name is XXXX. And he’s just been a blessing. You know, at the time their marriage and having to counsel with him, before that ever happened, before they ever had AKSOM, God prepared them and piecing them…just a blessing to see that the Holy Spirit, to see the man he’s become, it’s just really blesses my heart. There’s leaders in my village. I believe, I believe there’s people there that God wants to use, that could be effective and that they can go through AKSOM, you know. Financially they can accomplish much faster than a person that goes out for four years. For some it seems like six years and to have, to see a person go through a certification and license, you know, so eager to be educated in what God wants them to do. A genuine hunger, I know God has people in my village as well as in Emmonak, Kotlik, and Nunam Iqua. And there’s young families that God wants to bring out. And they can be a blessing and be able to fill in the places where there’s no pastor in many of the villages up the river. And praise God, I desire to see leaders coming out, Amen.

I – So do we. Do you feel that AKSOM has had any impact on your life or in your village (Q4)? Has there been an impact because of AKSOM?

P9 – Yes, we have. In my village, the people that are working at the clinic, at school, you know and to have AKSOM where they can go there and be taught, you know. And then they can have a better knowledge of living for Christ and that they can relate that knowledge to them in the workplace. Whenever they have, you know, when their boss tells them that they can be there for a week just a week, you know, wow. For a week, you study and then, you know, and then for some of them they can’t wait for them to come back and teach, you know, different lessons on God’s teachings. The fellowship is, to have believers come together that’s a…it really builds up
faith, you know. People working in the clinic, they don’t necessarily have to go out, but if they can be taught for a week and then later, a week later the different lessons that they teach and having to do a lot of reading and praise God. I see these health workers and other workers that work in the school or at the city, you know, believers in the city, believers in the clinic, you know. And to be that model, that they don’t drink, they don’t do drugs, even if they were in villages open to receive drugs and alcohol in that village. And so right now, it’s been dry in Alakanuk and Nunam Iqua. XXXX is open and so I’m glad for AKSOM because it really teaches deep and it involves people from different places, not just one place, to come together. XXXX is the hot place and so we get to encourage each other in the faith. Amen.

I – Amen. So the last question I have is there anything that AKSOM can do to help you better…to support you better (Q6)? Any changes that it needs?

P9 – I think for the ones that are showing interest in AKSOM that they would, because a lot of times I have to…sometimes I don’t even know until like the pastor doesn’t communicate. The person that’s coming in and then we found out then it’s too late. And it should be that the teachers that communicate should get in contact with pastors instead of just the hot place. And in advance, whether by, it would be nice to receive letters like what lesson they are going to come in, if they are going to meet in XXXX, what lessons they are going to teach. And that way, we would have time, I would have time to let the people know, let the young people know and the adults that we’re going to…there’s going to be a teacher that’s going to come in and he’s going to teach a certain lesson. And that we would let them know and we would know if anyone would be interested and at the same time could encourage the workers that we work with or the people that we know that have showed some interest in the Word of God that we could encourage them to be a part of it. And that they would encourage other young people that there’s going to be a class being held at that certain time. Mainly, it’s communication.

I – Anything else you’d like to share?

P9 – You know, we have a, what do you call it, it’s like a parent. They don’t have a pastor but we can go over and meet with families and we can let them know. And we can post and invite the young people there when there’s going to be a class. Because I know, I know what a lot of young people, because of peer pressure they can’t come to their church so because of that, the strong religion of their parents. If a class like AKSOM, it’s somebody coming in and is offering a lesson, they’re more likely to come to that place. That’s how it is at…we have Yup’ik people from AVCP {Bethel, Association of Village Council Presidents} and Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Corporation. They have groups that come out and they teach and they announce it. They’ve got a messenger…they got a messenger…and they have…with things…what’s happening with YKC. So if they received like a “what’s happening” with AKSOM in the different villages, testimonies, and the events…that they are going to meet at this place, this place or this place. That they would just send it to the P.O. Box just like what they’re doing, you know. And make it available and they would come. They would come and say, “Is this real? That there’s going to
be a class held at this place?” And so whether it’s…It’s usually in Emmonak because Kotlik can
get there, and Alakanuk can get there, and Nunam Iqua can get there. And so they have to think
about the seasons because the summer times are the busiest month. And during the fall and
March, the month of March and February, would be a good time, you know, too, because a lot of
our people are subsistence. They have to harvest food to…it’s a must. The store bought food is
so expensive. For some, a lot of families, depend on subsistence. Over 50-60% and not…It’s
gotta be more than 60% because 20% of the village, they got jobs. During the summer time, it’s
the busiest time, from June to September to go out moose hunting and fox hunting, to dry fish
before the month of July because July is so warm and a lot of flies like to lay eggs. For those
who are trying to harvest dry fish but the best time to do it is in the month of June where…before
the flies really appear. It’s a little colder but it’s better to do that so your dry fish won’t get
spoiled. And I’ve seen it. They call it emunk emunkuk. They would have to use it for dog food.
Spoiled fish.

I – And that’s too bad because I’m sure you guys work hard to get it, to catch it, and then you
have to feed it to the dog instead. Well, thank you so much. Thank you very much for helping
me with my study.

P9 – Do you have any questions?

I – Oh, I’m sure I will. So, do you mind…do you do email or phone or? What’s the best way to
contact you?
Appendix L

Interview Transcript, Participant Ten

Interviewer (I) – So really, I do appreciate you helping me with this.

Participant 10 (P10) – My pleasure to help you out, help AKSOM out, help Jesus out.

I – That’s right. So first, tell me about how you came to know the Lord (Q1).

P10 – How did I come to know the Lord? Wow. You know, I came to know the Lord…let’s just say in the beginning when I was a child at 7 years old. In fact, my dad took my family to a family camp. And I remember him taking my sister and I…she is two years younger, at the time 5…on a walk and he led us in the sinner’s prayer. And just, you know, of course we’d been going to church, the community church, and you know just wanted to lead us both to Christ. And he did at family camp. Well, he uh passed away of cancer just before I turned 13, and so my mom with 3 kids you know just heartbroken, disillusioned, everything…and quit taking us to church. So, I spent my entire adolescence away from church, away from the family of God. Fell away from God. In fact, my whole family did. And um, when I got into college, my second year of college, by the way meanwhile I’ve met my wife in high school and what have you, and she had grown up in a Church of God family, if you will, in the atmosphere but wasn’t really walking with Christ either. But I had a couple people in college, one was in my fraternity and another was a former basketball player at my high school, who had come to know Christ and they still had contact with me and had a real influence on my life. And so, through that the Holy Spirit’s working on my heart and um and reminding me of commitments I made and the touch of the Holy Spirit in my life at a younger age. And I can remember this wasn’t at a church, but it was at my grandfather’s home. I was spending the night and we were going to go hunting together the next morning, but there was just a variety of circumstances that led to this and I just remember crawling out of bed, kneeling alongside the bed, and rededicating my life to Christ at 19 years old. And I’ve never turned back. Um, shortly after that, I got water baptized of my own accord, where as before I wasn’t, you know what I mean. Uh, baptized in the Holy Spirit maybe two years later…maybe it wasn’t two years, but it seemed like it because it seemed like I sought the Holy Spirit a long time. Anyway, at a young adult age and I haven’t turned back.

I – Tell me about your calling to be a pastor (Q2).

P10 – My calling to be a pastor was kind of a long…I wouldn’t say excruciating process…but it was almost as if the Lord had to really convince me of some things and I…Well, number one, it was late in life, you know what I mean. I had a family, children. I went to Oregon State University and got a degree in Forest Engineering. And that was in 1980 and we moved up here into Alaska in 1982 to Ketchikan area and Southeast Alaska. XXXX Island actually. So, I had a
career going and I was still involved in church. In fact, the first church I was involved in on XXXX Island called the Upper Room. It was a brand new Assembly of God church and we had 8 or 10 people. That included the pastor and his wife. And so, it was a brand new work. So XXXX, his name was XXXX, was the first pastor. He encouraged me and mentored me and let me teach. He even let me preach a couple times. It was just being used of God in a variety of settings, leadership settings, that the Lord began to tug on my heart about, you know, more involvement, ministry and more full time fashion and that kind of thing. We were on XXXX Island for seven years and I was, meanwhile, I’m working for a private company. I’m getting promoted and so I got promoted to a position that had to take me into Ketchikan so that brought us to Ketchikan in 1989. So, I served under another pastor at that time and I was under his leadership. His name was XXXX, known by the district of course. It’s interesting. In a board meeting one night, this is 1992, so think about it...that is 25 years ago. That is 25 years ago. So, I’m a board member, this is after a board meeting, and like I said the Lord is starting to do…overtures in my heart. I am having thoughts. And my pastor, XXXX, ironically after the board meeting, I mean we are just having a casual discussion with other board members around, and he just looks at me just like I’m looking at you and goes, “I just think you are called into the ministry. And I want you to really pray about that.” And so, it was like he somehow saw that. And it wasn’t months later that we had a visiting minister named XXXX, who has been known by the district also. You know, he visited our church and he was at the time in a ministry called “Because We Care” and it was like a tape ministry. He would send tapes to the villages in Western Alaska and all around the state. Cassette tapes, which you don’t hear about anymore. Well, anyway, XXXX and XXXX, or whatever reason, had us take him to lunch. He was by himself that day. And so, we took him out to our home and like I said, I’m wrestling with these questions and for whatever reason…I had just met him, I had never met him in my life before that day. But he is sitting in our living room. My wife is in the kitchen fixing us lunch and our children are young and outside playing or whatever, and so I end up sharing with him my doubts if you will. My concerns that my wife, you know, won’t understand. She won’t understand this call on my life at this stage in my life. Ok? And he just sat there and he observed her for a while, didn’t say much. It was almost like he was very thoughtful about this. And I thought that actually it was a bit strange for a while, you know? What’s he thinking about? Well, it seemed like forever but it was a few minutes that went by. He looked at her and looked at me. Then he looked at her…we had kind of an open concept kitchen, living room, where you could see everything you know. And she wasn’t hearing this conversation because she’s, I don’t know, hearing the dishes clang, and what have you, pans and what have you. And finally he turns to me and he looks at me squarely in the eye and says, “That woman will follow you wherever you go.” Cindy, it was lifechanging because it was like a prophetic word, it was like…it went to my soul. And, uh, and so that really, really helped me. Um, and so beyond that, beyond that time...that was 1992 I believe and it was right before Pastor XXXX left and took another ministry position here in the northern part of the state...Fairbanks in fact. OK, so then, our new pastor, XXXX is his name, great teacher, great pastor. He pastored for 11 years. A good friend
of mine, actually. We’d been friends before he came to our church. Um, really encouraged me to continue getting credentialed so I actually started with Global University. I was taking college level courses with Global University. And I took some. I took Old Testament Survey, New Testament Survey, Pneumatology, you know some of the requirement courses. Um. Lost some momentum, all right. By the way, am I taking too long here?

I – No. We have an hour and a half.

P10 – Ok. All right. And so. You know I really had some momentum with it. In fact, he would...he had started something called Island School of Ministry, which was taught right out of our church. We had other students that had enrolled. Some of them not for college credit, but none the less for training. And so, like I said, I had some momentum but then um, a few years passed and I was struggling again. I had been promoted again in my company, the company I was working for, taking more of my time. And I have to tell you, I lost momentum. All right, it was just very, very difficult to keep up with, you know, life, raising children, being involved in the church, just everything. And so, I quit taking courses for probably the better part of 5 or 6 years in a row. OK, I mean I didn’t lose the desire to finish it someday; I just, I just lost momentum. Anyway, through a couple changes in pastorship…in fact, XXXX left in I think 2003. At that time, this is what happened…almost simultaneously…he announced that he was going to be leaving XXXX and going to XXXX to pastor there. Within weeks, I just, I really sensed that I needed to…as hard of a decision it was…I needed to resign from my position. I was actually a VP of a company. OK. Making quite a bit of money and I’m saying to myself “This is not going to happen. I am not going to finish this unless I do something different so I have the time to finish, you know, getting trained, getting the credentials I need to prepare myself. So, I resigned my position and actually started my own company…consulting company…and that was good but that allowed me to have free time, you know, I was my own boss, OK. So, like I said, that was 2003. I took a couple more courses but again I really didn’t have momentum. It was just difficult, you know what I mean? Again, running your own business, still raising family, they weren’t out of the house yet. No school deadlines so it was like…there was no impetus to really continue. And, so again, I lost some momentum. So, I had my own business for seven years. Seven years. So, in 2010, that’s seven years, in 2010 this same company…get this…this same company that I had resigned my position from had went through a bunch of changes in its own leadership I mean at the top, and the person who was actually in the VP or operations manager position, called me, knew me and said, “We’d really like you to come back to work. We’d really like you to come back to work for the company as an employee.” I said, “Really.” He says, “Yeah, um, right now it’s going to be for probably the first year or two going to remain in XXXX but we see this position actually being stationed out in XXXX Island.” In a couple of years. All right, so that’s 2010. Now in 2012, meanwhile, I’m…listen Cindy…I’m going through some difficult situations because of my own church leadership at the time, we’re running from our own church because we went through a real difficult situation. I don’t have to give details, just difficult. I was really wounded; I was
disillusioned. I really was. In fact I’m gonna tell ya, I came this close to not just leaving the church, but abandoning my faith. And there I am saying this on camera, but I’ve told other people. It was really, really a tough time. And we had an interim pastor come named XXXX who you know…prayed last night at the start of the service…came to be our interim pastor. Really helped me, helped me heal, gave me wise council, became a mentor to me again. And, uh, he encouraged me to get back on track. Get back on track with my training what-have-you, so in 2012 about the time…kind of near the end of his tenure and being an interim pastor there, to lead us through this transition and a difficult time. Um, AKSOM came along, all right. And I, as soon as it came along, I started to take classes again. Interestingly enough, my Ephesians class was with my former pastor, XXXX, he was the instructor. Isn’t that something. And it was by distance learning, OK. Now we’re still on the question of how’d I get called…

I – But that leads me into why you chose AKSOM (Q5b).

P10 – But you kind of sense the long history here and all along God is confirming his call on my life. Listen, it wasn’t just Pastor XXXX, it’s other people who come along and said I really see the call of God on your life. You know, I began more and more to believe it myself, and anyway. I guess here I am today to validate that.

I – So how did you find out about AKSOM?

P10 – Well, XXXX of course was one and XXXX…I just began to research and I just heard about it. I forget how I heard about it. But I just heard that it was available you know…distance learning. You know I was always interested in that because I knew that was gonna have to help me. I have a job. Everything was just going to be difficult. Not impossible, but difficult to get it done any other way. And so, once I got started, I knew that was the place. And once I took the first course, you know, then I read up all the information and said hey I can continue this if I want to.

I – So what have your experiences been with AKSOM? What do you think about the training it has provided you (Q3)?

P10 – Oh, I think it’s been marvelous. You know, I can’t speak for everyone, I just know that it was, the way it’s structured, worked. It was like a God gift to me. You know, for my situation and being in Southeast Alaska and the remoteness of it anyway, it just really, really helped me to get that momentum again and have a pace that worked. The instructors were all wonderful. I mean, I actually travelled up here several times to attend class here. I mean, it was expensive at first because not all the…what is it we call it…Voice to the Village, you know, not all of that…all the Internet, that wasn’t really well established yet. So, I did actually travel a couple times to Juneau and Anchorage to take classes. But then when I discovered the simulcast venue was available, that was even better. So I really made progress then. By the way, I actually was finishing my certified level and my licensed level at the same time. They actually, they said, “OK, if we see that this is working,” XXXX at the time was the director. And he said as long as
that’s working, and we see you making progress, and it’s not too much of a struggle, we’ll let you do that.” So sure enough, you know I was finishing certified and licensed level classes together. So, by the time, I don’t remember when I got licensed, I have to think about his now. It was a couple years ago I got ordained. So, it must have been 2014, I think that’s right…2014 I think is when I got licensed. So not too long really after AKSOM started.

I – So would you say they were flexible, their flexibility is what helped?

P10 – Flexibility, and willingness too, you know what I mean? Let’s face it, you know I’m not young in life, Cindy, you know what I’m saying. I had a lot of experience in the church. In fact, I had served as an associate pastor, OK. I just wasn’t credentialed. I was appointed and so…I’ve been in ministry in the church a long, long time. So, knowing that and having some relationships with course pastors who are in the state, I’m sure that helped. You know what I’m saying. And XXXX of course he knew that I’d started. He came back to Anchorage and he knew. He was connected to the Network and could vouch for me. You know what I’m saying.

I – How has AKSOM prepared you for your credentials (Q5)? Do you think it has adequately prepared you or is there other ways you needed to be prepared to get your credentials?

P10 – I would say it’s a combination of the training, you know the teaching and the courses and my life experiences and my ministry in church. You know what I mean? Just in life and being the hands of Jesus and His life through me to the people as well. I really think that both of those prepared me. And you know what? The hard time I went through, I didn’t see it at the time, but Cindy, that prepared me. That struggle and that trial in my life prepared me for today. It did.

I – So I think you answered how AKSOM has impacted your life and those in your church. How has it affected those in your church as well (Q4)?

P10 – Yes. I have to think about how I’m going to answer this question in the ways it has impacted them obviously. You know, I’ve used some of my training and actual curriculum to preach from. OK, so that’s a practical way if you will. In a direct way. Secondarily, I have talked about, with enthusiasm, AKSOM courses and encouraged my folks to get involved if they want further training. It doesn’t have to be for credentials, you know to grow in their knowledge of the Lord. And so, when I was still in XXXX, and by the way, this is when I got licensed, I was still in XXXX we had a time there when we had other students gathered and XXXX came and we did a simulcast from XXXX. And so we had several students join and do it there. Recently, this is just a few months ago, believe it or not, it’s funny you asked this question, but I had a young man from our congregation…he is young compared to me…he’s in his mid-30s. He has a young family, similar to my situation, he realizes that if he’s going to further his training and get credentials of any kind, he’s probably going to have to do it through distance learning of some kind. And so, He’s heard me talk about AKSOM a little bit but not real familiar with it at all. Anyway, he sends me this email and he goes, “Pastor, I can see”…whether this is a vision or his heart whatever and by the way I still need to have a discussion with him, it’s been that recent.
It’s been last week. He sent me this email and he says, “I can envision being your associate someday.” He must envision growth in our church where I’m, you know what I mean? Because I pastor a small church. But anyway, and he goes, “So, what do I need to do to get credentialed and can you point me in the right direction?” So here I am telling XXXX and XXXX, just last night, and I said isn’t this exciting? You know, hopefully I am going to propagate and encourage someone else to take courses through AKSOM and get credentialed as well. So there’s another benefit, another way if you will. I hope that answers your question.

I – It does. How did you get to XXXX?

P10 – To XXXX?

I – Yes, XXXX, sorry.

P10 – There is a XXXX. How did I get to XXXX? Listen, it’s funny how sometimes God brings you full circle. Ok, but listen, the Upper Room is where, is in XXXX. That little building is no longer there. The church was literally in an upstairs apartment. The first work of the Assemblies of God. And by the way, that is the only Assemblies of God on the island…is in XXXX. XXXX Island. And so, remember a while back here in the interview I told you when I was hired back on as an employee with the corporation I worked for, which is XXXX. That most likely they were going to want me on the island, XXXX Island, in a year or two. Well that is indeed what happened. So, listen, in 2012, I’m not quite finished with…if I remember right, maybe I was Licensed by then, I honestly don’t remember. I should know this but I don’t remember. But I was either going to be newly licensed or I already was and so I knew we were moving out there. Well I also discovered that the XXXX church was without a pastor. In fact, they had been without a pastor for almost a year. And so, my wife and I started talking about this and I said, “Honey, you know, I really think the Lord is talking to us, that this is the time.” You know, I’ve got back on track. In fact, my wife and I had a discussion one time when we were on our anniversary, long ways away, relaxed and able to think about things and talk about things like we hadn’t in a long time. And I was talking about how my heart was stirred again for ministry and my wife, thankfully said, “You need to finish your credentials.” That’s what she, you know, she was very stern about it. And so, I had, obviously I was well on that path, and so I said, “Honey, don’t you think the Holy Spirit is speaking to us about this is the time. He has set this all up. He’s brought us full circle. He’s taking us back to the place where we have our roots in Alaska. We have relationships there. You know we will be ministering to people who are grown up now who used to be children when we first were there.” And she agreed. And so, we put in our name amongst other people and was selected to come and preach and present our ministry. Of course, I knew people there so that helped. I know that helps but you don’t want to assume things, right? And, what’s the word, landslide…unanimous. This decision on the part of the congregation to have us come. So that was in August of 2012. And so here I am a vocational you know…I serve the church as their lead pastor but I also still have a vocational job and that’s the case to this day. So, there you go. That’s how I got there.
I – Are there any challenges you have? I don’t know much about XXXX Island, so are there any cultural differences like there are going to Alukanuk or Emmonak?

P10 – I would say yes but maybe not to the degree that some other you know remote villages in the western part of the state or the northern part of the state experience. But yes, XXXX is a village of about between 700-800 people. Closer to 700. Strongly Tlingit, some Haida. There’s both on the island. Strong component and I would say XXXX, I’m gonna say 60 percent or two-thirds Tlingit. So, we have Caucasian families in our congregation, we have Tlingit families. But because of the history there, the Salvation Army has had a long history in XXXX. So there are a lot of, I don’t know how to say this, there’s a lot of adherence and strong adherence by families to the Salvation Army. Which is fine. It’s interesting. The Salvation Army church is just up the street about two blocks. We’re real close together. We partner together, we work together, and we have a great relationship. But I’m just saying, you know what I mean, I would say the Salvation Army has a very strong pull on the Native component of our village. And so, that’s fine.

I - However they are finding the Lord,

P10 – That’s right, however they are finding Jesus. Our church is literally nestled right in the, I wouldn’t say smack dab in the middle, but almost in the middle of Bureau of Indian Affairs housing. In other words, housing that was provided to the village by the government and so low income housing. So, it’s almost as if we’re in a residential district. You know what I mean? If you’ve never been there before and you look out the window and say I’m in the midst of all these houses, well that is indeed true. And the city leased the land that the church sits on way back in 1990 so the church could be built. So, the church doesn’t own the property. The city leases it to the church for $25 a year. And it’s indefinite. It’s renewed every year. So, it’s God’s favor that that’s the case. Now that’s not obviously not a hindrance or a difficulty being there, it’s just a reality. So we hope that continues, you know God’s favor. So, the new church is not in the same location at all as the upper room. But it’s up on the hill. The church is kind of up on the hill and so that’s kind of neat, symbolically…a city on a hill cannot be hidden, so to speak. Jesus said that so. But so is the Salvation Army. And so, you know there are similarities though to other parts of Alaska in terms of what are strongholds, OK. Alcoholism, and drugs more so than when we first moved to Alaska. You know, cocaine and all of these hard drugs…heroin. Alcoholism’s probably still the lead, so we don’t have a high case of suicide but that has happened in the past. But a lot of depression, just darkness. And there’s still some Shaman, that kind of thing going on. You know what I’m saying. It’s ties to the old culture, if you will. We don’t see signs of it a lot but it’s still there.

I – Well, the last question I have is, what can AKSOM…How can AKSOM better support you (Q6)? Is there something that we can add or change or whatever to the program to better support you? As not just a pastor but a student.
P10 – So, now, that’s a present tense question.

I – Or even in the past, what could we have done better.

P10 – Boy, I wish I was prepared. You say to yourself how can I prepare myself for an interview when you don’t know what’s going to be asked.

I – And this is anonymous.

P10 – Nothing dramatically comes to mind in terms of gross need. Listen, XXXX and XXXX and the folks have been always approachable. I sensed that if I’d had a need and wanted to speak it out, they would have tended to it. And all the ones I did have, were tended to, you understand what I mean? So, anything I needed help with was “Oh, Yeah.” The bringing on of the simulcast and the ability to go remotely and to offer that for students. So maybe if that was a...if there was a broader range of villages where that occurred, that might be a help. So, for example, you know we’ve done it out of XXXX before but I don’t know if there is anything current. A lot of your simulcast venues are kind of…there’s a hub here. Does that make sense? You know, Eagle River, Anchorage, and I know there have been some out in places, so if that were to be offered and it was possible, that would be a help. OK, so maybe a central location in Southeast Alaska. Juneau’s been done before but maybe somewhere else further south. But that’s being a little bit selfish, because that’s where I live. And that’s where the people I have influence on and pastor live so. Man, that’s the only thing I can think of Cindy, really. Other than that, it’s…I was excited to hear that Ron Pratt’s book was on the ticket now for some of the teaching. That is really great.

I – I’m excited about that too. And Pastor Jack’s book…we can add that to history.

P10 – There you go. Absolutely. History component…for the next hundred years. Or two or three until Jesus returns. I don’t know when. Wouldn’t it…in a way it would be nice if He returned that soon and in a way it wouldn’t because there’s lots of people who still need Jesus.

I – Exactly. Our job is not done. So, if I have any follow-up questions or if I’m not…like “is this what you meant when we said” when I’m typing this up, do you mind if I email you or call you.

P10 – No, not at all. Please do.

I – I have your email so I think that will be good. Do you have anything else you want to add about AKSOM?

P10 – I am looking forward to your…the results and I’m hoping I get to see that at a later time. And so, maybe I can ask you, interview you…what got you interested in this particular project? Besides just having to fulfill a requirement.
I – I started with AKSOM in 2009. Well, we first…our church, Pastor Jack was our pastor, and Pastor Randy was our associate pastor. And he was very adamant about training people up. And they were talking about they were going to take these Berean classes. You know, maybe you are not going to get your credentials someday but you should join in with us. It was more of a discipleship thing. So my husband and I signed up and we took all the classes. We took the tests…everything. And then we just kept going. It was every Wednesday night. Instead of an adult class, we went to that. And we just kept going; we were enjoying them so much. Being a contagious Christian, and then when Far North came around. We stuck around for Far North classes. And then AKSOM, we did that. Then they taught classes every week so for a month you learned basically what you were going to learn on that one day but you were double prepared. And so I’ve just always loved AKSOM and I’m a teacher by heart and my doctorate is in education. I’m attending Southeastern, which is an AG school down in Florida. I guess it goes back a little bit to my call too. I was wanting to get a doctorate. I’ve been wanting to get one for a while and I just felt like God was saying “I’ve got some things for you to do.” And of course, that scares me. You now, when God says, “I’ve got some plans for you.” When we came back in 2012, the military moved us. From 2009 to 2012 we were in San Antonio. When I retired, we moved back. We got back into doing AKSOM again and I just loved it. And there was just one of those days where I was in a class and it was like that vision of “that’s going to be you.” And so I started talking to XXXX about it and said, “Tell me about what you do for AKSOM.” And that’s when I felt God saying “You are going to get your doctorate.” My husband said, “You’ve got to find a way to pay for it.” And you know what? God makes a way. I had seven months of the GI Bill left and it’s been loaves and fishes. They gave me another year with the new GI Bill and it’s going to cover the whole program. So when God’s in it, He is going to make a way for it. Yeah, that was just kind of the impetus behind going to school and then I’ve loved AKSOM and I do the producing of the videos every month. We sit behind the camera and talk to the folks in all the hubs. But going to a Christian school, I got to choose what I would like to look at. So I told them, “You know, I have this burden for those individuals in the villages who want to become pastors but how do we get it to them? How are we going to make it accessible?” And the just talking to XXXX about AKSOM and my professors said, “Why don’t you combine the two and find out what it’s like. How hard is it to get the Internet in the villages? Because I hear that a lot too.

P10 – Yes, it can be. For example, Cindy, at XXXX, our Internet is not as good as XXXX, which is only seven miles away for whatever reason. AT&T is the reason but I’m just saying what a little difference makes. So this fellow that goes to our church, this young man who wants to start his training in getting credentialed, is from XXXX and so that’s where he lives, so that will work for him. And even if it was the opposite, if it was not good in XXXX but was in XXXX, I’m sure he would be willing to drive seven miles to take it on a Saturday to do the simulcast. Well, that’s really wonderful.
You know what, this goes back to your question about needs and stuff and...AKSOM may have needs. One of them I’ve always suspected is more instructors, more pastors, whatever especially if the locality that they are in helps out, you know what I mean? Because, let’s face it, it’s costly, just the logistics to get from here to there is quite a thing in Alaska. And so, I, not that I would ever get this opportunity, but I would love it, maybe someday to serve as an instructor. You know, I’m ordained now so I qualify...I think I qualify. And I have a lot of experience and I would love that. I love to teach. It’s probably one of my giftings anyway. And so, I don’t know if you want to write that in your dissertation or whatever but...

I – I’m writing it down.

Anyway, I’ve enjoyed this immensely.

I – Thank you very much.

I believe in AKSOM

And so do I or else I wouldn’t have chosen it. I am very passionate about teaching and teaching others. You know, I was telling one of the other interviewees it goes back to that old adage of if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish, you feed him for life, but that’s...if we teach others about the Word of God and teach them how to teach others about the Word of God, it just continues to propagate down the line. If we just teach them, here is the Word of God, well then what do I do with it?

Second Timothy 2:2 –

Yes, exactly

And by the way, I had forgotten what that said but in a conversation with XXXX and XXXX last night kind of after the service was over, he says, and by the way I was sharing with him about this young man again, wanting to start his credentials process. And so he says, “Take a look at 2 Timothy 2:2 again.” So I was trying to remember what does that say. So I got on my phone and looked it up...oh, yeah, OK. That’s fitting.

Well, and my husband and I, like I said we only, we teach during the school year for Eagle River Christian School but our summers are open. But I know for a lot of the villages, that’s when they are doing their subsistence hunting and fishing. So. We’re just leaving ourselves open. And I think that’s kind of the thing from all the interviewees is leaving yourself open for what God has for you to do. That’s what we’re looking at, just leaving ourselves open.

So coining a phrase from last night’s message, you may have new borders to cross very soon.

We are getting our papers ready to cross. Well, thank you. This was great. I appreciate it, I really do.
Appendix M

Interview Transcript, Leader One

Interviewer (I) – Thank you again for being a part of my study.

Leader One (L1) – You’re welcome.

I – My first question is, what do you see as some of the strengths and weaknesses of AKSOM (Q1)?

L1 – Um, one of the, I suppose that depends on what you are comparing it to. Um, I guess if you are to look at weaknesses, and I don’t know if it’s fair to compare it to a four-year Bible college, but one of the strengths I guess would be that you don’t have necessarily the Bible college experience and quite as much class time. So that would be, and again I don’t know if it’s fair to call that a weakness or not but if you are comparing it to the Bible college experience, that would be one of the weaknesses. There’s not quite the ability to go quite into depth with some of the Greek and Hebrew, church history, and things like that that could be important. A lot of that depends on what context the minister is going to be going to. So, for many contexts, that’s not important, or not as important, I’ll say. However, if you are comparing it to a more traditional, such as Berean, this has uh class time and time with a professor. So, that would be one of the strengths compared to something like Global or Berean, is that you do have connections with the professor and you have interaction with other students. And so, moving on to the strengths, one of the strengths is that you do have that classroom experience and you have interactions with other students. And good quality textbooks that they have access to. But also, I think one of the major strengths of AKSOM is that you do have…you can build relationships with other leaders in the Network. Other, you have access to Presbyters who are teaching or other pastors, other missionaries, other ministers. So, for example, for me as the XXXX, I teach three classes. So, by the time someone shows up to the process for credentialing, I know that person already because I’ve had them in my class. And that’s a huge benefit for me as the XXXX. And hopefully also for the credentialing is that as they’ve been through AKSOM, that they know who I am, and they know who XXXX is, who is our credentialing assistant. And so, I think that might take away some of the apprehension and it also gives them a head start in building connections. So, I think that’s a major strength. Another major strength is flexibility. We try to maintain a very accountable system but at the same point we try to be flexible to meet the needs that are out there. For example, our simulcast system. Because of the geography of Alaska, we can’t just say, “OK, we’re gonna have a class here in Anchorage this month and everyone’s going to come to it.” That could cost thousands of dollars for someone. So, we’ve gone the extra mile, our leaders have, to be able to make that available. And even to the point of traveling out to all these different bush locations to do everything possible to mentor and to provide education needed for these potential ministers. Let’s see what other strengths? Well, I would
say the quality of the professors as well. As I look across our faculty, every single one of them are very qualified, some of them with education, many of them have their doctorates, many of them have their masters and so they’re not just getting just anyone. And even those without the higher education, they have a good deal of experience in the field. They are getting high quality education. And also I will add another advantage is cost. For $50 a class…I don’t think you can go anywhere else and take care of your education for that. I can also add, I don’t know if we talk about this later on, the fact that now AKSOM is being recognized by other colleges as being able to transfer credit. And that would include universities such as Northwest University, Southeastern, Southwestern and I think there’s some others as well. I don’t have the whole list in front of me. But so, when a student finishes AKSOM, depending on the school, approximately 30 credits can transfer over into those programs. And that’s a tremendous benefit. And also, that means those schools are recognizing the value of AKSOM and the educational value that it has.

I – What effects have you seen of AKSOM on the lives of pastors and the villages (Q2)?

L1 – Well, I will give you one example. I was just down in a village down in Southeast and I was talking with one of our pastors who did go through AKSOM. And he was telling me about one of the ethics classes, the ethics class he took through this school. And he was telling me about some specific practices that he/they have put into practice that he has taken directly from that and is putting it into practice so… I didn’t ask him about that. He just was telling me about it and that was a great blessing to him. So this is specifically about the villages, right?

I – Yes.

L1 – Also, I know especially with XXXX and XXXX, they’ve spent, probably more than any of us…they’ve gone out to the villages and spent a lot of time, and the mentoring relationships they have developed. They’ve gone even far beyond the value of the courses themselves. And when I look at my time in seminary, I remember all the classes I took but even more than that, I think it’s the relationship the professors had built. And still, if I have questions, I’ll still, even 9 years later…it hasn’t been that long…yeah, it’s been 9 years later… I’ll still contact them asking them a question. And they are available to me. Well, and I think that’s not uncommon for a Bible college and student relationship. Now we’ve developed the same thing with AKSOM. When these pastors from the villages have a question, they’ll call, and they’ll ask XXXX or they’ll ask XXXX, or they’ll ask me or you or different people and they’ll ask questions because that relationship has been built. And so, I think the value goes even beyond the courses themselves to the relationships that have been built. And I know they are putting into practice the things they’ve learned from the classes.

I – So they are practical?

L1 – Yeah.
I – So have you been able to go to any of the villages like XXXX? If so, what are some of your experiences there (Q3)?

L1 – Yes. OK. I’ve been to…well the villages I’ve been to, to teach, would include Point Hope, Nome, Bethel, Kotzebue, Yakutat…I don’t know what you qualify as a village. Like Delta Junction, I don’t know if you would count that as a village or not, but I’ve been there, one of our more outlying areas. My experience has been, it’s been a tremendous value not just to the pastor but also for the congregation. And what they’ve done is they’ve opened it up…oh and Emmonak is another one…They’ve opened it up to the entire congregation and the pastors there are viewing it an opportunity for Christian discipleship and development. With not just people that might be involved in ministry but for their entire congregation. So, some of the villages will have 8-9-10 people show up and they are not all interested in credentialing. They might not all of officially signed up for the course, but they want to learn, and the pastor wants them to learn. And we really encourage not just ministerial candidates but everyone to come because you never know out of the base you are developing, who might rise up out of the AKSOM experience and I think we’ve seen that happen with some of our AKSOM students. They didn’t know they were interested in ministry but after going through it gives a chance for that calling to germinate and to develop, so that’s very valuable. And we’ve learned when we go out to villages, it’s just been a valuable time of being with the congregations and I always love the discussions. I found them to be very Biblically informed, many of them. And they have very good questions to ask. We really enjoy it.

I – Is there anything else you would like to share about AKSOM?

L1 – I don’t think so. It’s a great program. I’ve really enjoyed being a part of it and I love to teach and be involved. So, I think it is safe to say it has blessed me as much as it has blessed the students. To see the students working hard toward their goal and applying themselves. XXXX is an AKSOM student. And he took the pre…he has opportunities occasionally to preach in his youth group and so he took the preaching class from XXXX. And sometimes when I’m seeing him prepare, he’ll have that textbook open and he’ll be using it to help him develop his sermons. So, I can say from my family, it’s been great blessing. He’s been learning and taking it seriously. And I really believe it’s a tool that God has risen up across our land, especially in Alaska. It fits like a hand in a glove to meet the need we have here. Our professors teach for free…there’s no compensation, so it’s a labor of love. It’s a mission for the Lord. And they do it all cheerfully. And so, I would speak very highly of all of our professors and everyone who helps out with producing our simulcasts. It takes a lot of work and our director XXXX of course was our founding director and then XXXX has done an excellent job after that of leading. Him and XXXX have done a great job. So, it takes a lot of work. And that’s how we keep the cost low by not having a lot of expenses. I think that’s it.

I – Thank you very much.
Interview Transcript, Leader Two

Interviewer (I) – How did you get involved with AKSOM?

Leader Two (L2) – It was a pretty natural thing on two fronts. At first, I was involved in Far North Bible College as an adjunct instructor there. And was involved in the leadership of the college as a board member. So, I was involved with Far North quite a bit. And they were getting ready to close Far North and I wanted to be involved in whatever followed that. And the second issue and you probably, a later impact, was the fact that I did my doctoral study on training Alaska bush ministers and people from bush Alaska for the ministry. And did interviews with a number of different denominational leaders and lay people and pastors and missionaries. And developed something that turned out to be something very similar to AKSOM. Just almost like it. It was a blueprint from my studies.

I – What do you see some of the strengths and weaknesses are of AKSOM (Q1)?

L2 – Well, the strengths are that it takes the ministry to where the people are and that was always a weakness of the former mode of doing things. We needed to be able to get the training where the people are rather than asking them to uproot and come to Anchorage. And that just was not a good model, especially in dealing with Alaska Natives. It’s just culturally not a very workable mode and so being able to take the school to the regions where they were was a very big plus, I think. Weaknesses, I guess it’s…there’s always going to be some things you can say. One might be that it’s not an accredited study for getting a degree, but that’s not what the people here are trying to reach anyway, typically. And so, I would say that an early issue and the elder would be simply getting good buy-in from the local people. But I, I haven’t seen that to be that much of an issue either. Of course, I’ve been gone a few years.

I – In the time that you were with AKSOM, were you able to see any effects of AKSOM on the lives of those pastors or their villages (Q2)?

L2 – Yes, because I was in the district office. It was my job to keep the statistics for the district. And at the time we began all of this, we didn’t have any Native senior pastors and at one time we had a number of them. But at that particular point in time, we didn’t have any. And that was really a long…I mean a number of us and so when AKSOM had been going probably less than a year but certainly less than two years, we were already beginning to see Native pastors in there, both senior pastors and staff pastors. So that was a little plus.

I – Great. Did you get the opportunity to go into any of the villages to teach and if so, what were your experiences there (Q3)?
L2 – I didn’t get out to very many of them and I don’t consider Kenai as a village, but we did teach regularly in Kenai and Fairbanks as well as Anchorage while I was involved. But I did do one school in XXXX and that went well. And I’m trying to think if I did any in any other bush schools, but I don’t recall that I did. But that one was very well received by the local people. We had two or three churches within commuting distance of XXXX that participated in there. We had a 100% completion rate which is always an issue where they actually finish the work and complete the course and they did.

I – Great. Is there anything else you’d like to share about AKSOM?

L2 – Well, I’m extremely partial to it so you are not going to get an unbiased statement from me. I’m very much a supporter of AKSOM because I feel like it’s been very effective and will continue to be for as long as we can get the support and keep good instructors, which I think also has been a real plus for us. We weren’t sure we could get any instructors outside of the three of us that basically started the school under district supervision, and that’s of course XXXX, XXXX, and myself. At first, we were the teachers, but that changed over time and now looks to me like they have a number of good instructors. So, I just believe it’s an extremely valuable, important ministry and hope that it continues to garner the support that it needs to be effective.

I – Me too. I’m a big supporter too or else I wouldn’t be doing my paper on it.

L2 – Yeah, I’m sure not.

I – Well, that’s really all I had.
Appendix O

Interview Transcript, Leader Three

Interviewer (I) – So thank you again for helping me with my interviews. And my first question is kind of the icebreaker of how did you get to Alaska and get involved with AKSOM?

Leader Three (L3) – OK, well, I was between ministries in California and they had a school there. I was superintendent for a Christian school of 750 young people. And then, the “dotcom” went bust in 2002-2003 and when it did, parents started pulling their kids out of the Christian school. I had been hired about a year and a half prior to that to be the superintendent of the school. So, I was the most recent administrator that had been hired and so, when they knew they needed to let somebody go, I of course was the one because they weren’t going to let 20 and 30-year employees go. They let me go. So, they gave me a great severance package and I was in between ministries so, I sent out resumes. And quit doing that. We just prayed that God would have somebody contact us and invite us where God wanted us to be. And that’s exactly what happened. We got a phone call from a person in Alaska who called and asked if I would be willing to come up and teach two classes for Far North Bible College at that time. And so, came up and taught the two classes and within a week the superintendent invited me to have lunch with him and he said, “XXXX, what’s it gonna take to get you to come to Alaska?” and I said, “It’s gonna take a miracle.” My wife has a great job in Berkeley, California with a…for a group of attorneys and she wasn’t with me on the trip and you know I’ve been happily married for 33 years at that point because I don’t make these decisions on my own. So, she called me on Monday, and she said, “You’re not going to believe this. Patrick, the lead attorney, has decided that 5 weeks is too long for you and me to be separated. They’re paying to fly me to Alaska for a long three-day weekend.” So, she came up and we just…they took us to a hotel, the Captain Cook Hotel, put us in the top floor. Beautiful view and a corner room and we saw the beauty of Alaska in January actually, and that was it. We just knew God wanted us here in Alaska. And so, we came up. I became the academic dean at Far North Bible College that was in the process of becoming accredited at that time. And so, I had been through that process of course with Trinity Bible College in Ellendale, North Dakota. And so, my involvement there with ABHE, the Association for Biblical Higher Education, set me up perfectly to be a part of the team to put together the accreditation documentation and everything. So, I came on board to do that and to work at Far North Bible College. And we had everything ready to go and we had the paperwork. Everything was really ready, but we weren’t doing so well at getting students to come in from the villages. And the reason for that of course is money. These kids would have had to not only move to Anchorage but also be able to pay that money back for their education and so forth. And so it became a real decision making time about the Far North Bible College and the Presbytery decided to close the college in the Fall of 2008. And when they did, it was already…the blueprint had already been established for, with the DSOM movement, which is the
District Schools of Ministry in the Assemblies of God, which at that time had, oh, 18 or 19 different districts that were a part of that at the time. And so, Alaska moved in that direction and set up a DSOM in Alaska called AKSOM, the Alaska School of Ministry. And I was invited to join the team that was putting that program together. And a couple years later, the person who is the director at that time, shifted positions. He is still a part of the administrative team, but I became the director at that point. And so, that...have I adequately answered that or is there some more you’d like me to share?

I – Oh no, that’s good. What year did you guys come to Alaska?

L3 – We came up here in about 2004-2005 in that area and have been working here ever since.

I – Wonderful. So, what do you see as some of the strengths and the weaknesses of AKSOM? And how is that unique compared to other methods of credentialing/training? (Q1)

L3 – Well, the normal method of development for ministry credentials within the Assemblies of God of course is one of our Bible colleges. And that would be the top, I think. I had the opportunity, XXXX and I, to go to Bethany Bible College in Santa Cruz, California. I don’t apologize for that at all. I think that was the best possible education that I could receive. And looking back on it, it actually established the foundation for all of my ministry ever since that time at Bethany Bible College. And so, the foundation was there. And my dream was higher education and to be involved in developing men and women for ministry. I used to go to bed at night with my head on the pillow dreaming of the day when I would be able to minister in that capacity. And so, one thing led to another. We continued our education and I finished my education and so forth. And then when all that ultimately led to being a part of AKSOM, it was just a perfect situation. AKSOM is designed as a program with flexibility, which is probably the best word to describe AKSOM. It is flexible in that it allows students to not be in a particular college, per se, where they’re taking classes over a 17-week semester and so forth. But they’re still being prepared with courses that they take that are needed for them to be effective in the ministry of the Gospel. Our normal preparation is a student calls, signs up for classes, we send the textbook to them along with an overview of questions that they complete and answer and put together. And then after they’ve read the book, done the overview, they send the overview in for grading, and that is 40% of their grade. They come together for a class that meets on a Saturday. And that Saturday class lasts pretty much for the day. We start at 9:30 in the morning and we generally run until mid or late afternoon. They take an exam. And what happens is, basically the overview is they’re preparing their own study guide for the test as they are reading the textbook. So, they’re getting the material by reading the textbook, filling out the overview, and preparing for the material for the exam. During that day class, the instructor is going through a PowerPoint presentation of the material from that textbook plus material that they add to that. And so, the student’s not only getting what they covered in the textbook by reading, but they’re getting additional material by ordained ministers who have, many of them have higher education beyond the bachelor’s degree and are pastoring within our network or administrators within our
network in the ministry. They’re teaching the classes to the students. And as they take the 27 classes, actually almost 30 with the internship, so they’re taking 10 classes a year for three years. And then they work through the credentialing cycle at the same time. And so, within 4-5 years, they can become ordained as Assemblies of God ministers. Flexibility is the greatest part of AKSOM for our students. Our program allows them to come on board and start taking classes at any time from September to May. They can begin taking classes. It’s easy for them to take one class a month because they have the whole month in order to prepare for the classroom situation that they’re going to be in. At the same time, we’re doing the classroom, we also simulcast that class throughout the state of Alaska and beyond on the Internet. So, as we have people who cannot come to Eagle River to take the classes live, they can go on the Internet and they can sign up for the classes just like everyone else. They come together on the Internet, they watch the instructor teach the class, and then they take the exam at the end of the day. We even have it set up as close to a live situation as possible. The students sign on to the chat function. They’re able to ask questions of the instructor while he’s teaching the class. The producer takes the questions that they’ve typed in to the chat function. They give those questions to the class and the instructor and the instructor answers them right then in the classroom and it goes right through the internet to the students that actually asked the question. It’s as close to a live situation as you can probably get. So, we’re doing three classes for the months of September to May, one at each level: certified ministry, licensed level, and ordination level of ministry. We also make DVDs of each class, which allows for those churches in Alaska that…some of our churches still do not have adequate internet speed to allow them to download the class and to be able to receive it that way. In their case, they can still sign up for the class, read the material, do the overview, and then we will send a copy of the DVD, the PowerPoint, and the exam to a proctor who will in turn make sure that they watch the video, they’ve turned in their overview, they’ve watched the video, and then they take the exam afterwards. So, by flexibility, I’m implying that there’s many different ways that they can receive this material besides just being in the classroom. There’s opportunities for people in Alaska, especially rural Alaska who would not otherwise be a part of an educational program that would allow them to prepare for the ministry as an Assemblies of God minister.

So, besides flexibility, the strengths include it’s flexible enough to allow them to set up their own time schedule as time permits. They can also work in focus groups, if you have 5 or 6 students in a particular church that are taking classes, they can work in a focus group situation where they discuss the material and spend time with that material before they get to the class. So, there’s a great opportunity for interaction to take place, for learning to actually take place in that environment. It’s very cost effective. Students can take classes for a $25 application fee one time followed by $50 per class plus the price of a textbook. So, that’s about as cost-effective as they can be. Usually the total cost is $75 a class once you’ve filled out your initial application.

One of the weaknesses would be we still have, you know, is getting people involved. We would love to get all of our villages involved and especially our Assembly of God churches and so
forth. Probably the greatest challenge and difficulty that we face is if a pastor is sold on
continuing education in his life and in his ministry, then he’s going to be a support person that’s
going to encourage that to take place in his own church because he’s learned that education is
something that as a minister you do throughout your entire life. You never come to a place
where you say, “Well I’m done. I don’t need to study anymore.” Lifelong learning is a
tremendous need for ministers to stay up to date, to know what’s happening, there’s always new
books being on the horizon and new scholarship they need to be familiar with and so forth. And
so, having pastors that buy in to the program and realize how effective it is, are the main people
to sell that then to their church and provide opportunities that encourage it within their own
church. The pastors of the churches that are doing that are very effective with AKSOM and
they’re having very good results with their people being credentialed, educated then credentialed
with the Assemblies of God as ministers. And so, it’s very effective that way. That would be I
believe the greatest weakness for the program. So, have I hit on everything there?

I – Yes, you have. What effects have you seen of AKSOM on the lives of pastors and their
villages (Q2)?

L3 – The change foremost in the pastor and his life over the period of time they’re involved in
the AKSOM program. We have the opportunity through this educational process to mentor and
to speak into their lives. I have the good opportunity, a tremendous opportunity really to be able
to fly to the villages and teach people in this program first hand. We have some pastors who are
sold on the program so much that they would like for us to come and to be in their church for say
a Monday night and Tuesday night or a Thursday night and a Friday night. They have maybe
three or four people taking the class for credit in order to take the exam but their whole church
can sit in on the class and have the opportunity to gain that knowledge and that understanding of
the Scripture. They have an opportunity to ask questions and to interact with and educator in that
area. I think our greatest impact of course is with the pastors who are involved but by extension,
congregations and people who are allowing themselves to be exposed to this educational process.
And we hear feedback from people all the time about oh what they learned and how encouraged
they’ve been and how they’re using the material. In fact, a number of them are already using
much of the material that they get in the instruction and the classrooms, they’re already
preaching that material and teaching that material to their own congregations as they have the
opportunity. It’s great to see the development of a pastor, of a person called into the ministry or
maybe they’re not even aware of that call but the desire to learn about God, to know more about
Him, and to take the courses and then watch God minister through the educational process to
move them into a place of ministry themselves. And a place where they just can’t get away from
the desire to apply for credentials and launch out into ministry or support ministry for other
pastors. So that interaction, the mentoring, as I mentioned I get to fly out to the villages and
teach so I have the opportunity first hand to mentor these men and women that are preparing and
it’s just phenomenal, you know. Usually when I go to the village, I’m busy except for when I’m
sleeping or having a meal, we’re talking about the material. As they’re studying and they’re
reading, and then you link that together with the practical challenges that they face in the ministry itself, and the questions that come up. We dialogue almost continuously while I’m there. And so, mentoring becomes a tremendous part of that link. Now, we have that opportunity locally when we teach live classes to the people. But when you’re in the village, you’re there. You fly into that village and you can’t leave until you’re done teaching and so the pastor who may already be pastoring the church who’s continuing his education for credentialing, he has you available to him the whole time you’re there and he takes advantage of that by spending time with you and it’s just phenomenal. It’s just very encouraging. It’s exciting to see that and it’s great to have been a part of that process to be able to be used by God to be a part of the educational process individually through the mentoring process and so forth that takes place.

I – What would you say has been like your most notable experience of being in one of the villages (Q3)? What is the one experience that you will never forget?

L3 – Oh boy. Well, there’s been several. I think probably one that stands out remarkably is the pastor XXXX who pastors at XXXX Alaska. XXXX Alaska is located on the northwest tip of a spit actually that goes out into the Arctic Ocean up there, the Arctic Sea. And they’re on a spit out there and he is pastoring that church. He’s been there for years now and he’s been a part of AKSOM. And when I fly there, the hours that we have spent dialoging and talking and just allowing all of these…in the educational process you tie one thing to the new thing you’re learning. You’re tying that in at several places in order to remember it and in order to keep it for the future and to gain greater understanding. And XXXX has been, he is just a master at doing this. He is working on a college degree in social work. He’s a social worker there in the village. In fact, if anybody has an emergency at all, he is the point of contact. He gets calls in the middle of the night, 3am, 4am, from some young person who’s getting ready to take a bunch of pills and commit suicide. He gets a call and he’s expected to move immediately and do whatever he has to take care of that. Well, his life in that social arena and the challenges he faces together with what he is learning in ministry, have just been…it’s just been phenomenal for our dialogue to go back and forth about these processes. And how he can more effectively minister socially to the people in the village as well as professionally as a pastor in the village. That has been…there’s been others, but I think probably that has been very, very strong. He will be ordained coming up at our next Network conference, which will be next April of 2018. And I’m really looking forward to that opportunity to watch him do that.

I – I enjoyed his interview. Last question, have you seen any issues with Alaska Natives or any other pastors who are having problems with the materials or understanding the material?

L3 – I’m thinking, my mind is going back, but I don’t think that we have. Every once in a while, we’ll become aware of a person who maybe this would not fit in to their learning style. They would work better with Berean courses or perhaps Global courses. And we have had students who are so talented and so gifted that we’ve done everything we can to encourage them to a four-
year college. Because we’re aware that that is the best possible of the educational processes to become a minister. And they would experience things in Bible college that they would never experience. As well as we can make it, we would never come up to what a Bible college is able to do. And so, we do run in to that once in a while a person doesn’t fit in. It takes a person being motivated I think, that’s something. A person has to be kind of a self-starter. They have to be committed to reading the textbook. They have to be committed to searching for the answers. The correct answers for their overviews. They also have a sacrifice of time. They have to be able to come to class or to be a part of one of the video, the video program or through the Internet. But for somebody who is touched and called of God to the ministry, I don’t think.

We’ve had some people that have done it for a little while and then stop out. They’ll not take classes for a few months but then they come back. And that’s the beautiful part of the program. They could do that if they need to and then come back if they have a personal issue in their life or something that’s consuming their time. They’re able to come back. We have that flexibility. But I don’t recall of having people who have, I mean we’ve had people who have just left the program. Probably one of the things that we could do a better job of would be to somehow either through a phone call, an interview, or a follow-up communication of some type to find out why they stopped or find out why they quit. Now, there’s challenges in that of course. Having been a former dean at one of our Bible colleges for 6 years, I got the opportunity to interview students before they left the college to find out why they were leaving. And the one thing I learned from that is that most students will not tell you the truth of why they are leaving. They just won’t tell you. It was this or that or something. They won’t tell you and so it makes it very difficult to get good feedback on that in order to be able to help them so that they can overcome the challenge or the difficulties and continue at the school. Grades of course becomes an issue. They don’t put themselves into the study role as much as they should. Some students don’t know how to study. We try to make up for that by Freshman seminar and different classes that can help. In our situation, that’s where that mentoring comes in. We have to be able to communicate with individuals and be able to counsel them through the first couple classes and encourage them through the first couple classes. Usually after that, they commit and they just stay with it until they finish. But it would be nice if we had all of our students or many more stay throughout the whole process and finish. At the same time, we’re also aware that not only Bible college but AKSOM becomes a weeding process for students who God has really called into the ministry. For those students who are really called and they’re studying and they’re preparing for their future life of ministry, it doesn’t appear to be too difficult at all. They’re just ready to rock and roll and move their way through the whole process, apply themselves so that they can become credentialed with the Assemblies of God. We’ve been very fortunate in that for the past several years usually between 85-88 percent of our students who take AKSOM classes get credentialed as Assembly of God ministers…Of those that are being credentialed have taken classes with ASKOM. That’s a very high percentage. That’s an excellent percentage…between 85-88 percent. So I would say that our program is effective for those students that are willing and apply themselves to be able to do it. It would be nice to have more but again, you know that it’s
a weeding process and that some people have maybe views of the ministry that become much clearer as they would begin taking the classes and they suddenly realize this isn’t for me. I remember in Bible college in pastoral ministries class when the president was teaching the class. And I had a good friend in front of me and we were talking one day before class started and he said, “XXXX, this class has taught me one thing.” I said, “What’s that, XXXX?” And he said, “God has not called me to be a minister, to be a pastor.” To be a pastor specifically. And he was a writer and he became a writer and wrote many pieces for the ministry but at the same time he realized from the class that God had not called him to be a pastor. And that’s one of the beautiful parts of education. The worst thing we would want is for a person to push on through, become a pastor, and who knows the effectiveness of their ministry or what damage they might do because they forced it instead of realizing that God had not called them to that particular position. So, thank you for giving me the opportunity to share.

I – Thank you.
Interview Transcript, Leader Four

Interviewer (I) – Thank you again for doing the interview for me. How did you get involved with AKSOM?

Leader Four (L4) – Oh goodness, well that’s gonna take a little bit, OK? I came to Alaska in… I was recruited to come to Alaska in 2001 to oversee leadership development. I was working on a doctorate in leadership with the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in Springfield. And they had made a nationwide search for somebody to come and do what they called the Dean of Higher Education and the Director of Alaska Leadership Development Network. Big, big titles. But anyway, they chose us after looking at several different other people and they chose us to come. Then we had to go back and raise a mission’s budget because it had to be missionary funded in Alaska. And so, I came and started the process of overseeing leadership development. Whenever I was working on my final project, my dissertation project, for my doctorate in leadership. At that point in time, the Assemblies of God had been in Alaska for 83 years and we had one Native pastor anywhere in Alaska doing, giving leadership to a church… 83 years, one Native pastor. Fifteen percent of the population…15-17 percent of the population…is Alaska Native and we only had one to show for that. So, I was casting vision about how to do leadership, about how to empower people…that’s what my doctorate is on is empowering indigenous leaders for the Alaska context of ministry. How do we do that? And of course, we’d looked at a lot of educational venues. We tried to do some stuff with Berean School of the Bible, I used to work for Berean University and then Global University. I was the Dean of Student Affairs, so I knew about that. I knew about the cost of that. Probably the inhibiting factor in Alaska was the cost of that and also just the lag, the time lag and the lack of one-on-one relationship with the student and with the institution. So, we tried that. It didn’t work well. We had a few successes but not many. We tried an in-state Bible college. Far North Bible College, which was started years ago out in Bethel and I was the President of that for a while. But we just never could get a stable, progressive student body. We were always just a few students and wasn’t seeing a whole lot of success. Not a whole lot of turnout from that into leadership within the Assemblies of God. And so, one day as I was at the District office, this was back in 2007-2008. XXXX, who was the Superintendent, had a brochure that he had picked up I think at a General Presbytery’s meeting, about the DSOM movement…the District School of Ministry movement…which was started basically at Appalachia, Kentucky. XXXX, who was the Secretary/Treasurer of the Appalachian District, was the motivating force of that. And he had this brochure and said, “Why don’t we check this out?” And so, I did. I called XXXX, did some investigating and called XXXX on the phone. And for the next hour or so, we talked and there was not only an excitement about the program but there was also a kinship that kind of formed there as well. Because a lot of what they were facing, we were facing, except on a larger scale...
here. And so, the DSOM movement was a hand-in-glove fit for what we needed to do in Alaska. Matter of fact, I’ve told the DSOM leadership on a couple of occasions, I said, “I don’t know if you know it or not, but God created DSOM just so we could use it in Alaska.” Because it just fit. We didn’t have to pay upfront moneys for curriculum or things of that nature. The Appalachian District shared everything we needed to begin the process with us, free and gratis, no charge. We could charge whatever we wanted to for courses and at the same time, my parents had passed away. They had left me a small inheritance and I took part of that money and turned it into scholarship programs so even those that couldn’t pay. I’ve always said if they could pay in salmon and muktuk it would be fine. But first national bank won’t accept salmon and muktuk. So, we had to make some way that it was affordable to them, especially in the villages. And so, we could charge whatever we wanted to charge, we controlled that at the district. It was just a great fit for what we needed to do, and we saw it meet a need almost immediately. There were people who were in the pipeline who were frustrated with the process of credentialing…the educational requirements for credentialing. And DSOM spoke to every one of those. And so, whenever we began AKSOM, the Alaska School of Ministry, it was just a blessing from God. It was a God moment. This is what we had envisioned. Matter of fact, I can’t take credit for the vision because it goes all the way back to Dr. Glandon back in the 50s and 60s. Dr. Glandon had this vision of taking a school everywhere in Alaska and equipping people. And he did good with what he had but now that we’re seeing this thing just explode and it’s because it was such a…I believe just a God moment for Alaska. Absolutely. So does that answer the question?

I – It does. What do you see as some of the strengths and weaknesses of AKSOM? And how is it unique compared to other credentialing training (Q1)?

L4 – And matter of fact, we made it “uniquer”. The strengths of AKSOM, as I alluded to a minute ago, it’s portable in a sense that we can take it anywhere in the state we don’t have to have a whole lot of heavy investment as far as curriculum and all that. It’s very portable, which is very good for us. It’s also, as I said, the cost factor. We can put whatever cost we want to. The only thing the student really has to buy…we do charge for tuition and that’s progressively gone up a little but over the years…but the only thing they really have to buy is a textbook. And with the scholarship fund we can even help them with that, if they are needing funding. So, the cost of it is very good. The hindrance that the DSOM movement had when we first joined it is that they would have a class once a month district wide and everybody in the district would come to that class or classes if they did three different levels. I went to the…the first DSOM I ever went to was in Ohio and I went to Columbus and they brought in, it was probably 200-300 people. But anywhere in Ohio, it’s two hours to Columbus so they’d come in. They’d come in on Friday. They would do Friday night and then Saturday, and they stay over the night. But driving distance is 200 miles anywhere. I went to the DSOM in Arkansas, same scenario. They did it at their District camp grounds in Hot Springs…2-2 1/2 hours anywhere in Arkansas you can be there. We couldn’t do that in Alaska. And so, I love the concept. There was one drawback to the concept that I didn’t like, as an educator I didn’t like it, that they would come in
on Friday and they would go over the text overview, which is the basis of what the test is based upon. And they would go over the text overview with all the students, they would help them understand the correct answers, and then they were allowed to study all that evening if they wanted to, if they wanted to stay up until whatever time in the morning, then come back in first thing they would do on Saturday morning was give the test. And then they would teach the course. And I looked at that and said, “No. This is backwards.” But, we have academic freedom with DSOM. We can do it however we wanted to as long as we met the requirements of a test and having them read a textbook and all that. So, I came back and said, “We’re not gonna do it that way.” Number 1, we can’t bring students in for two days. That’s impossible. Number 2, we can’t even bring students in if it’s not in one of our metropolitan areas either Anchorage and its environ; down on the Kenai peninsula, somewhere around Kenai/Soldotna and its environ; Fairbanks and its environ; but that’s the only three major centers we’ve got. Well, we can fly to Juneau and do it down in Juneau. And that was another thing. I saw this as we’re gonna have to do the travel. We can’t get the student…require the students. And plus, out in the villages, and it’s expensive to go to the villages, $1000 for a plane ticket. So, if we can’t go to the village, we’ve still gotta have some way that they can have somewhat of a one-on-one…this was back before we started the internet feeds and all of that. And so I said, “If we can video tape the classes in Anchorage, with live students and a live teacher, if we can video tape those, create a CD, send that to a proctor in the village, the proctor ensures that the student watches the video and then takes the test and has the text overview already filled out, whenever they come the proctor has to kind of be our representative. They still, even though it’s not the best of a live course, it’s still they’re seeing a live teacher, they are hearing live students, and then they can contact us if they have questions. And so, but DSOM had never ever done anything except live courses and so that was a weakness that I saw that if we can’t do video, we are still very hindered. Well, I went and did some stumping for that and had to do a little bit of selling, had to do a little bit of explaining. Had to help them get an understanding of our culture here and of our circumstance. Then they finally were willing to do it. They took a chance on us. It’s worked well. And then whenever we started the internet, then it really has worked well for us. I hope I didn’t get ahead of you but that…So those are some of the weaknesses we had, you know that it just…and we can’t always go to where the student is. We try to as much as we can, but we had to have a way of doing it and thankfully the Lord helped us with that, with video and then with the Internet.

I – What have been some of your experiences with AKSOM in the villages (Q3)?

L4 – I’ll tell you, the very first village and I was privileged to do this. We had gone out to the village of XXXX, which is almost at the end of the Yukon River before it empties into the Bering Sea and it was in the winter time. I had gone there with Missionary XXXX and I was going to try to start a venue in XXXX and also bring in a little village called XXXX, which is, I don’t know how far away it is, several miles away. And so XXXX and I, after talking with people in his church, he and I got on snow machines and went down the Yukon River…It’s 20
below…and went to XXXX and presented the concept there to some people and left material. Back then we were using…it was on the Life of Christ, the first course we were going to teach, Life of Christ. And was using an old book. It was a little antiquated, but you know with live teaching you can make it work you know. But anyway, I left all that material and it just didn’t materialize, didn’t materialize until finally one day I got the invitation. We have to go by invitation. We can’t just barge in. To come back, teach the course, which I did. I taught it at XXXX. The people from XXXX, the people of XXXX. The people from XXXX came over. It was in winter time and you travel…they came over by snow machine. I had taught, it was on Saturday. I had taught probably for three hours from maybe 9 o’clock or so until well after noon and I was getting tired. And these people, I had been talking about the Life of Christ and finally I said, “Maybe we need to take a break and get something to eat.” And XXXX, who was one of the students. XXXX is now one of our success stories pastoring the church in XXXX. But XXXX looked up and…I would teach and I would look out and people were crying. And then I would teach and I’d look up and people were smiling. It was like saying “Sick’em” to a dog. But when I said, “Maybe we need to stop and eat,” XXXX looked up and said, “Pastor, you are feeding us. Keep feeding us.” They were so…they were like a sponge. They had been so neglected for so long and now they were just soaking it up. And they didn’t want anything to interrupt that flow and that feeding that they were getting in their spirit. And so, needless to say, we didn’t stop for lunch. I kept teaching. What was the question?

I – Your experiences.

L4 – At that particular one where this happened…that was the very first AKSOM venue in any village in Alaska. At that one, we had a young man that XXXX, the missionary, had invited, “Just come on.” He had just gotten saved. He never even opened the book. Didn’t know anything about what was…XXXX said, “You need to come to this. Just come, come.” He came. He listened. When I handed out the test, and he was a sharp young guy I could tell. But the Spirit of God spoke to me and said, “That young man, he’s special.” And so, I said, “Why don’t you take the test.” He said, “I can’t take that.” I said, “You sat in the class. You heard it. Just take it and see what happens.” He blew the top out of the test. From there he began to develop and he is still working with XXXX in Nome, Alaska. He works some in Kotzebue. He’s in the process of developing. Anyway, that was the very first one. Others that we’ve done, I’ve sat and just…same experience. People just sit there and they are so hungry. I’ve gone and actually taught and it became more of a revival. I preached. The whole village would turn out. Well, not the whole village but part of them. A lot of the village would. And they weren’t interested in getting any kind of credentialing, they weren’t interested. They just wanted to come and hear. I’ve preached for three hours solid and had a shoutin’ time with these as well. So, it goes beyond an educational process in the villages. It goes beyond a culture…cultural, social and a very much an evangelistic opportunity as well.

I – My last question is what effects have you seen that AKSOM has had on the lives of the pastors and their villages (Q2)? Have you seen any?
L4 – Well, number one, I’m very much…my whole vision, my whole ministry is leadership development. And so, I’ve seen people who had no clue that they could even ever arise to a level of spirituality where they thought they could be leaders in a religious sense, in a spiritual sense in their village. So, I’ve seen men and women…you know, it’s not rocket science. Everyone’s a minister. And so, I’ve seen them with the concept you know, “I can do this.” And we’ve given them the tools to do that. There’s very few things we can do as an organization to develop leaders except we can give them tools and we can give them affirmation and recognition. And one of the things we’ve been able to do is give them the tool that they can rise up and begin to develop and understand their own abilities and skills. One of the greatest examples of this is in the village of XXXX. I went to XXXX with one of our Native ministers that we had at that time. I went to XXXX just to carry the bag of this guy, because I had no recognition in XXXX. But because of XXXX, I had recognition. XXXX was a man, they didn’t have a pastor, but this was a Native man probably in his 50s. He and his wife XXXX, and they were just giving oversight to the church. All XXXX would do to come in, he’d pray and they’d read some Scripture and pray some more. Or maybe someone had something to say. And once again, I felt God speak to me and I told XXXX, I said, “You know, you can pastor this church.” He said, “Oh no, I can’t be a pastor. I don’t know how to preach. I’m not a good preacher.” I said, “XXXX, you don’t have to be a good preacher. The Bible only says you need to be a good teacher to be a pastor. That’s the only qualifications and I’ve heard you.” Because of that, he began to take AKSOM. We would purposefully go there, even though it was just a handful of people, we would go there, spend the money to go there. And now XXXX and XXXX are pastoring that church. And so, if the question is “How have I seen it affect people?” I’ve seen it affect people to the point that they are willing to respond to the call of God on their life. And I got through all this without crying. Almost. And that story can be repeated. I mean it…You go to XXXX and there’s a repetition of the story there of somebody that has been invested in but just didn’t feel they had the qualifications and we’ve been able to bring them up. One of the greatest, and this may have nothing to do with your question but maybe you’ll want to put this somewhere. This is the part where I’m gonna cry. At the District Council, at Ministry Network Conference, after the Thursday evening service, don’t use names but XXXX came up to me. Whenever I first wrote my book, which is based off my dissertation, XXXX wanted a copy of my book. It was several years ago. I don’t know if I sold it to her or gave it to her. Anyway, that’s been several years ago. And XXXX was a developing leader. She had a desire to minister to her people, she’s Inupiaq. Anyway, she came to me and she said, “I want to tell you something.” She was just ordained. She said, “I want to tell you something.” She said, “Something in your book just turned a corner for me.” I don’t remember exactly how she put it but like “It became a revelation for me.” She said, “You said in your book that what God is looking for is not empowered leaders as much as empowering leaders. Leaders who will empower other leaders.” She said, “For so long, I’ve just been trying to seek to be an empowered leader, I wanted all God’s power. I wanted to go out.” She said, “All of a sudden I realized that’s not my”...“I need to be empowering other people among my people to rise up to
leadership.” It was a whole new dynamic for her. If nothing else, that was worth it. That was worth every bit of it. To have one Native person who says, “I get it.” And AKSOM, XXXX of course is a part of AKSOM. AKSOM has helped her have the tools and now she can direct people to those same tools to help them as well. To reach that empowering process. Second Timothy 2:2 – That’s my life verse. “Timothy, the things I’ve shared with you, share with others who will share with others who will share with others who will share with others…it’s that ever broadening ripple effect. And that’s what we are looking for in Alaska. And AKSOM has helped us do that.

I – That’s awesome.

L4 – Yeah, that is awesome. That it?

Addendum:

XXXX shared with me after the video and audio were turned off, that one student from XXXX told him, “Thank God for AKSOM. You took a boy and made a man out of him.”
Appendix Q

Interview Transcript, Leader Five

Interviewer (I) – What do you see as some of the strengths and weaknesses of AKSOM (Q1)?

Leader Five (L5) – Strengths and weaknesses. Well I think there’s a lot of strengths. First of all, it’s localized ministerial training in a local geography context. And in Alaska, AKSOM would work for the professional person who can’t leave home, wanna stick with their job and not have to go to a traditional program and really not have to be tied down too to a program that is real intense online. And so for the professional who’s busy and feels a call to ministry, but they can’t break away for education or spend an intense time on the internet or in research. AKSOM gives them the opportunity to fulfill the credentialing responsibilities for the Assemblies of God. To the person who may live in remote Alaska and then the internet become very valuable for that purpose for our purposes and the fact that we have instructors that’s willing to travel to these remote places to the villages is a real strength as well. It’s also very cross-cultural. We have many different cultures that are involved in AKSOM. And even though Alaska may be small in numbers, in population size, we have a broad demographic of people. And the nations of the world live in Anchorage and even off the road system in places like Barrow, a large Filipino community. And then across our state are Alaska Natives. And so we have the opportunity to touch a lot of different cultures and it’s very adaptable for those cultures and fits those cultures really well. A real strength for us again has been we’ve had people who are willing to travel to bush Alaska and go to these remote places and spend time with our Native people and do a lot of one on one training. We’ve done it for one, we’ve done it for more than one. And so I see all of those as great strengths for the ministry.

Weaknesses? That’s always a good question when you are evaluating yourself. What’s a weakness of AKSOM? Let me go back to another strength too. It also works for the young person. Now, what I’ve asked our AKSOM leaders to do when they’re talking to young people about education is that they always point them in to the direction of higher education…18, 19, 20, 21, 22-year olds are really at the greatest opportunity in life to go to a traditional college and receive training and receive instruction. Where maybe someone who lives in an isolated setting or someone who is a business professional has career, family, job, can’t do that, the young person can. And I want our young people to have the best and the greatest opportunities that they want to take advantage of. Now, for the young person that does not want to leave home AKSOM might be an option for them. So, I just want to make sure our young people understand all the different opportunities they have when it comes to education and preparing for ministry in the Assemblies of God. And in our particular case, it could range from AKSOM all the way to going to a traditional college. It could be Global University, it could be Berean, it could be possibly an internship program in a church-based Bible school. And so, we don’t want to detract
or take away from the young person not understanding what opportunities are available. I think Alaska young people, you know, is a very eclectic group, they really are. You’ve got young people who are just waiting for an adventure of a lifetime. They’re living right in the middle of an adventure of a lifetime, they’re waiting for an adventure of a lifetime and so those young people, they can’t wait to leave and go somewhere else. But by in large, you know Alaska young people aren’t so necessarily excited about leaving their roots and their home. We’ve watched it over the years with them trying to go south and go to school and there’s great distance there. And so, they may be more prone to stay home. And some of these young people really feel a call to ministry. And so, we’ve seen them as seniors in high school taking AKSOM courses, wanting to get a jump on ministry preparation because they feel a call to ministry. And so that can be a strength but if we’re not careful and we don’t talk about our program properly and effectively with younger people, it could be a weakness as well. But that requires us to effectively speak to all age groups and helping them understand opportunities. So, I suppose the first weakness could be our failure to properly make sure that young people understand what their other opportunities are. Rather than in Alaska choosing the safe zone of remaining close to home and AKSOM. AKSOM is very affordable. If you’ve got a young person that’s called in to the ministry and they’re trying to weigh the difference between the cost of higher ed versus the inexpensive cost of AKSOM and money is a factor, you know they could very well choose that inexpensive route. Thankfully that is available for them. So, I never want to detract or take away. I want AKSOM to…I would want AKSOM to always be a training vehicle that is for everyone but those that may have other opportunities understand what they are. I think a good higher ed person, and we’ve got great higher ed people leading AKSOM in XXXX, XXXX, XXXX, XXXX. And they understand the importance and the value of higher ed. So, I think in their roles when they are being sought out and they are being asked questions by young people, they’re probably very suited to be able to sit down and explain AKSOM is an option for you but there are other options and to point them towards higher education.

Weaknesses? Wow. I’m such an AKSOM fan it’s hard for me to critique weaknesses. Organizationally, AKSOM for us in Alaska and the success of it has been we have great leaders. And two of those great leaders are fully funded missionaries. And one of those great leaders gives 100% of his time to the ministry. Organizationally for us, a weakness would be we haven’t yet found money in the budget to be able to fully fund that key director leadership person. And in the event that we no longer had a wonderful leader like XXXX, and a fully funded missionary, we would be restricted/handicapped in finding good academic personnel. And maybe even finding anyone period. So, I think organizationally for me personally, the greatest undermining risk of our Alaska School of Ministry would be the internal failure to create a funded position to be able to fund the director and adequately fund the administrative side of the ministry. Now, the quick answer for that is to obviously raise the cost and we are under the…I think Alaska is under the cost of most districts from what I understand in talking to my peers and other superintendents in what they divulge. We may charge half, maybe even less than half, of what most of them charge. But even if we came up to that number that most of them charge, we still
wouldn’t have enough revenue to fund that position. And so, I think a weakness for us would be having adequate resources to fund the future of AKSOM. And I believe AKSOM has a future. I wouldn’t even want to envision at this point not having a ministerial training program like AKSOM for Alaska. And I really don’t want to envision an AKSOM without the qualified leadership that we currently have, who have a strong academic background. When Northwest University looked at our program, one of the first things at the top of their list that they communicated with me was the leadership that we had. They were wowed by the leadership. They were even wowed by the depth of some of the instructors and how we have been very careful and very selective in choosing instructors for the program. And so, they really felt like that AKSOM had some great strengths and had a lot to offer. And so, I don’t want to go backward in that regard. And just being very transparent, candid, I probably spend more time thinking about what can I do to help AKSOM on the revenue side as we go forward into the future. You know, we don’t have a lot of paid staff in our network, and we had a paid DYD. And we didn’t hire a DYD back to that full-time position and it was because we wanted to look at our revenue, look at our financial structure. And we wanted to position ourselves best for the future financially. And all those things have been put into place. And so, if our network was going to have another fully funded position, what would be the best position to fund that strategically positions us as an organization to offer ministerial training and it’s AKSOM. You come back to AKSOM every time. You can’t come up with another position in the network that would be of more value and produce more fruit and be more effective in ministry preparation than the Alaska School of Ministry. So, the Alaska School of Ministry in order for it to be strong in the future, we’ve got to position ourselves to have a financially viable future for funding the ministry department as well as the directors. I think another critical, I don’t know that it’s a weakness, but I think we have to guard against it as we are selecting personnel; the fruitfulness of our school of ministry and the effectiveness has been our ability to move around the state. And while we have been approved for streaming and we’ve been approved for some online stuff or sending DVDs, because of the remote geography of Alaska, and we do some of that. We’ve got to be very careful not to become that completely because one of the great strengths of our school of ministry has been relationship-based education. And you go to a streaming model, relationship is reduced between the student and the, whoever the instructor might be or however the ministry might be set up. It seems to diminish the relationship side. You go to a DVD, and that may be even more so. And so, I would be concerned that we end up with a program where we’ve diminished the relationship because we no longer have the ability to get out to the locations that we need to get to whether in remote Alaska or some of the further distances even on our road system. And I wouldn’t say it’s a weakness, but I would say that without the right personnel, it could be a threat to the ministry because we’ve got to continue to have the ability to have the best relationships that we can. And with the Native people of Alaska, in order to grow relationship, we have to be in their community. We have to have community with them. We have to understand their community, we have to participate in their community. And our instructors if they are going to instruct and train for ministry in bush Alaska, they need to be able
to relate to the community in the bush. And you can’t do that without getting right in the middle
of it. I was blessed to live in western Alaska for almost 12 years and blessed to have the
opportunity to travel up and down the coast of western Alaska. And every ministry trip I ever
took to any of our remote locations, and even to this day, I always learned something while I’m
in that community. And so, for me, understanding the culture of western Alaska, that
educational training manual is still being written after over 30 years. Because I know on the next
trip, I go out I’m going to learn something else. And that just helps me relate to them in
community a lot better. And so, I don’t want to see us isolate ourself because we no longer have
the ability to do that. Weaknesses? I don’t know that this is a weakness and I don’t know how
to evaluate it. Maybe your study will help but I’ve always wondered about that short, even
though it might seem long, I mean we…the way we talk about it, it sounds long…a day, a full
day where you sit under an instructor. Is that 4 and a half hours or whatever that is, 5 hour, 3 and
a half hour to 5 hour teaching model…is that as effective as it could be? It’s an overview of the
text. They’ve read the text; they’ve done the study guide; they come to the class. And they sit
and they listen to a lecture that’s probably broken down into what, two maybe with a break in the
middle and then they take the test. And right now, all of our leaders are saying that’s sufficient
to complete that class for meeting the Assemblies of God requirements. And so I’ve, I know I
went to a college and I/we have to understand this is not the same thing obviously. It’s much
different and I wouldn’t trade anything for my classroom experience that I had. But I’ve always
wondered if that model is sufficient. I don’t know how else to raise that question. I’m not going
to say it’s a weakness. I’m just going to say I’ve wondered about it. And I’ve wondered
whether reading a book, doing the study guide, sitting in the class, and maybe we’ll say even
100% on the test. Is that sufficient for learning ministerial ethics? Is that sufficient for learning
hermeneutics? Is that sufficient for homiletics? I know my experience with homiletics was two
courses in homiletics, Hom 1 and Hom 2. And Hom 2 required a preaching experience in the
classroom. And your preaching was actually critiqued. And so, is it sufficient for learning the
Gospels, the Life of Christ? Maybe. But is it sufficient for all the other courses? And so, I don’t
know the answer to that question, but I have wondered about it. And we have approval to do it
and our students that are coming through AKSOM seem to be doing really well and they’re
prepared well. You know, we have the internship program. I’m not going to say that’s a
weakness. I’m not just gonna come out and say that’s a weakness, but I’ve wondered about that
too. Is that sufficient? Again, evaluating what I’ve heard about the internship program from
some of the students versus my own experience. And is the practical side of ministry surfaced
enough to where it’s really mentoring the AKSOM student to be the best minister that they can
be, you know. You’ve got to have educational training, but you need practicum, you need
practical, the practical side of ministry. And I have to say that I’ve always wondered about that.
I wouldn’t know what else to add to the weaknesses. And if I had all day to talk I could probably
talk about quite a few strengths, but I think I’ve highlighted probably what’s important there.
Does that help?
I – It does. What effects have you seen of AKSOM on the lives of the pastors and their villages (Q2)? Speaking specifically of village pastors. Not necessarily Alaska Native pastors but those working in the villages.

L5 – Well. Those working in the villages. Well, we have so many good examples. Wonderful examples. Probably the one that I think probably all our AKSOM people would talk about would be Pastor XXXX from XXXX. And I met Pastor XXXX and XXXX back in the early 90s, shortly after they had gotten saved. They were at one of our Nome camp meetings. And I just felt like then that Pastor XXXX was probably, the Lord had probably marked him and called him into the ministry. But you know over the years, trying to help train him was really difficult to meet the requirements of the Assemblies of God. And when I became XXXX in 2008, Pastor XXXX had his certified ministers provisional credential. And they’ll only let you carry that credential for a couple years. And so, we were really coming to the end of that to where we had to get him fully certified. And we started our school of ministry in 2009 and XXXX and XXXX really began to engage Pastor XXXX and was going out to XXXX and spending large amounts of time with him to work him, to lead him through the certified ministers, that first level. And we were at the end of the year and we had to get him through. XXXX went out and stayed I think, XXXX stayed for a couple weeks. And we just, we watched Pastor XXXX work really hard. And the relationship really strengthened between our office and Pastor XXXX and that village. And so, from 2009 to present day, he’s went through all the levels. I remember when he got ordained. That was a beautiful thing at Network conference. And now he’s a presbyter. You know he’s on our board. And the benefit of maybe what it’s done for them has been to help them understand that we desire, and really do desire, to have Native leaders and village leaders who are ordained in the ministry with the Assemblies of God. We desire that. We desire to have relationship with them. But I think also for us, I think the benefit to the Assemblies of God and the organization, the denomination, we’re the ones who win you know because now we’re starting to see a transformation within our leadership structure where we’ve gone non-Natives leading to having Natives at the table helping us lead and govern within our governance structure. And so, the day that Pastor XXXX said yes to becoming a presbyter, and the day that his region voted him in, because he met all the requirements, that was a great day for the Alaska Assemblies of God. And we didn’t get to really celebrate it and begin to realize it organizationally until this last April. And I think also, you know over the years I think XXXX’s felt the encouragement. XXXX is a team player, I mean he is all in. And he, I think it’s helped him have a great view into our church that yes, there is a place for you. But also, we’ve got an ordained pastor in the village. And I know that that has meant a lot to the village. I have watched our village leaders and the Native people of Alaska seeing Pastor XXXX get ordained and I’m telling you they couldn’t be more excited and more proud and more happy. It’s kind of like a big deal. And you know I think of Pastor XXXX in XXXX. Pastor XXXX you know is a professional in the community and he’s a counselor. And he’s been in the community for over 30 years. XXXX married to a Native lady; XXXX’s his village too. And there, the XXXX people are his people. And he feels very, very called to them. I asked Pastor XXXX a question.
Last time I was in XXXX, which was just a few months ago about, “When you retire, do you see yourself leaving XXXX?” He goes, “No. This is my home. These are my people. This is where I belong.” And so, Pastor XXXX rededicated his life to the Lord, came to Christ, God put His hand on him, called him into the ministry. And I believe, I don’t know what level of credential Pastor XXXX has right now, I want to say License maybe, I think he’s getting close to ordination. But our school of ministry helped prepare him and XXXX is the far most northwestern community on the North American continent. And it’s as isolated as isolated can be. And on a clear day when you’re flying to XXXX, you can see Russia. I mean he’s above the Arctic Circle. They believe XXXX, that community could very possibly be about 5,000 years old, making it the oldest community of people on the North American continent. And our school of ministry has trained and prepared a village pastor for that community. And so, I know it’s meant a lot to XXXX, it’s meant a lot to his family, the church is growing. It’s not to say it hasn’t been without some struggles. You know as it is in all these ministries that are remote, but also for Pastor XXXX. Pastor XXXX I think on the credentialing side, I think he may be the only XXXX in the Alaska Assemblies of God. And so, his first Network conference that he attended, this is his story and I’m pretty sure it’s ok for me to tell because he told it in a setting of more than one. He attended Network conference and of course it’s all white and of course there’s Natives, some Natives not many but a few. And he’s looking around and he goes, “Well, where’s my people? I must be in the wrong place. I don’t belong here.” But he got to thinking about it and you now he’s praying with us that God will bring more XXXX into the community of the Alaska Assemblies of God. And I thought that was real exciting. But he’s on track to get ordained, I’m pretty sure it’s to get ordained. But it was transformative for him, his family, his community. And for the communities to have their people in these spiritual leadership roles and not depending on the missionary or the white man from outside to come in and do that for them, they’re empowered spiritually. You know, they realize that that comes from the strength of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. And that even our church places confidence in their leadership and desire to see them lead their villages and lead their councils spiritually, rather than have the white man come in and do it for them. I don’t know if I answered your question.

I – You did. Have you been able to experience any of the AKSOM classes with XXXX or XXXX in the villages (Q3)?

L5 – The answer to that question would be no. I have not. I’ve not been with XXXX or XXXX to the villages, but I have experienced it from afar. I’ve watched it closely. I’ve listened to reports from both the instructors as well as the student, and so I’ve been able to experience it that way, but I haven’t been able to experience being with them.

I – Do you have anything else you’d like to share about AKSOM?

L5 – Oh my. That’s a good question. Well, I guess from 2009, when we first started in January, to our present day of 2017, I’ve watched the growth and the maturity of the ministry. And for me as a leader, who has empowered other leaders to lead the way, last year to have had
Northwest University put its stamp of approval on our program and being willing to offer transferred credit with an articulation agreement, that was a very exciting day. And not just our school of ministry but I think the DSOM association has caught the attention of the fellowship of the Assemblies of God. And a lot of these DSOMs are just as salty, they’re well organized. They’re led by great leaders. And yes, we have the approval of our executive presbytery but we’re starting to receive the approval of our higher ed institutions, saying “Yes, we can offer transfer credit and they are willing to offer to give articulation agreements.” And so that just happened this last fall, no I think we received our articulation agreement about a year ago so. But when they came up and examined it a year ago last fall and they started evaluation the program and we were getting A pluses, I have to say that I was very, very pleased. The other thing I like about AKSOM is that it is a Pentecostal training, ministerial training program. Spirit empowered and Spirit led. And I think all of our instructors that are involved in teaching AKSOM, they are “pro” Assemblies of God, and they are Pentecostal. And I think that’s very important for us in equipping and training leaders for the future. I think AKSOM has a bright future. I’m very committed to the continual growth of AKSOM, organizationally as well as instructionally. And would hope after I’m gone and others are gone that we’ll look back and continue to see the great value that this training model has and has had. You know, Alaska is going to be Alaska for many, many, many years to come. And if Jesus tarries His coming, maybe even generations to come. It has its challenges and so it’s geographically very large and very diverse demographically. The future looks bright. I think AKSOM’s flexible enough, it’s nimble enough that we can take on other ethnic groups, like we’ve done with the Hispanic part of AKSOM and having Hispanic instructors like Pastor XXXX. We can do that with other people groups. And the people groups are going to continue to come to Alaska. Now, over the years Alaska’s going to continue to change demographically but it will always have that remote context. And as long as it does, and as long as these communities are isolated the way that they are, it is the answer for training future Alaska Native leaders. It was proven very early to have a great value in that context. And it will continue to be an answer in training future Alaskan leaders. And exciting day for me will be when one of our Alaska Native leaders is leading and AKSOM class. So, with that being said.

I – Well thank you. That’s all I had.

L5 – Ok. Thank you for involving me.

I – Yes, it’s great.

L5 – Have you enjoyed it?

I – I have.

L5 – Have you learned a lot?
I – Yes, and I’ve met a lot of people that I am excited about…I’ve been invited to their areas just to visit and maybe bring some of the courses that I teach or other courses that…just go and see how life is in their village or in their area. It is very exciting and I’m enjoying it.

L5 – You know, I didn’t bring this up when we were talking but you know when it comes to the school of ministry and in the village context, I think what XXXX and XXXX have tried to do is contextualize it to how they learn in the village. And they’ve gotten a really good understanding of that, you know. But the courses themselves, sometimes we have to break it down into cultural context and I don’t know that we do that. I don’t know that we don’t. That’s always kind of a knock on all of us who are not from the village and go to the village. They don’t say it this way but we’re not contextualizing the Gospel to their culture like we should. And that’s not always thought and learned overnight, it’s just not. I don’t even know that I’m good at it. I go to the village though, I know I have to be a different preacher. But it’s been a huge success for us I think.

I – And they seem to really enjoy it. There were 6 actual Alaska Natives that were interviewed. I did get to interview XXXX.

L5 – Did you do that by Skype? Phone?

I – I did all of these during the Network conference.

L5 – Oh good.

I – So in the off time in between the sessions and the night services and after lunch, those were…I was able to sit down with them. So I got XXXX, I got XXXX and his wife, I got XXXX. Then I got a few like XXXX from XXXX and I got XXXX, XXXX. And so I really have a diverse group of individuals.

L5 – Right, right. I forgot about XXXX, yeah XXXX took some school of ministry courses.

I – So I’ve had a great time just, oh and the folks at XXXX. There’s three of them up there. Two of them that have taken it and Pastor XXXX has been kind of overseeing it so I interviewed all three of them just to see the aspect from the student and from the person that’s doing the

L5 – I think this is a great project. When XXXX and XXXX were telling me what you were doing, I was all, “Really.” That will be interesting to read.

I – My goal after I get the dissertation done and get it all turned in, is to write up a report for you so that you’ll see the information I’ve received from the students and I’m getting from the leaders as well. And I really am seeing the key words like flexibility, relationship…those are the key words that I’m getting from the students. Building confidence. They’re feeling empowered and that’s a great thing to hear.
L5 – I noticed, I think I read, want to make sure I read it, yeah, the result may also be a benefit to the other District Schools of Ministry. So, are you taking a macro level look at DSOM? Or just snapshots?

I – Just the AKSOM portion but XXXX asked me that once I’m done and I give you like a report then share my information with the DSOMs as well and say this is how ours is working

L5 – Oh, I see. So how we’re working may benefit…yeah. Well, and I think some of the requests that we’ve asked for has probably helped DSOM because quite frankly the nimbleness of the program, the flexibility of the program, wasn’t there in totality when we started. You know, for example this idea of streaming. That really, based on the guidelines of DSOM, if we just looked at that we wouldn’t have even…It was an aggressive or optimistic or really wanting to go after what’s best for us here in Alaska, we might not have said a word about it, but they did approve it. You know the fact that we can send the DVD, obviously we don’t want to do all the courses that way but we, it’s obvious up here doing what we’re doing, we can’t just be a one-horse engine. We’ve got to have other ways of training. And I think the streaming has worked but I honestly didn’t want to do it when they first started talking about it because I didn’t want to diminish relationship. We’re already handicapped in this area of relationship off of the road system. And I’m probably more familiar with it than most. I don’t know that I’m more familiar with it, I understand it more than most. Because for the first 22-23 years in Alaska I lived off the road. So, I get the mindset. I understand why they feel the way they feel. You know when we go to them we have a general piece of muktuk with them they’re not going to be so quick to say we don’t care, you don’t ever come, you don’t understand, we’re all alone, you know. While those are not my emotions, I understood though how somebody could feel that way. You know I didn’t need a phone call, we’ll say once a year. I didn’t need somebody from this complex to come see me. And I don’t know that they do either, but it helps them know we do care about them. And we’re always going to have that. I think, these guys that have done all the traveling around the state, they’re really my heroes because it takes a lot to do that. I mean even the superintendent traveling, I travel the state a lot, I travel the state as much as our AKSOM guys. But I travel the state a lot and I know the older I get the harder it gets to travel to some of these remote places. But that relationship is so important. But yeah, I’m an ASKOM fan though.

I – Me too.

L5 - Pray for the future.

I – We are.

L5 – I ask God to put a pause on XXXX getting older.

I – Healing touch to both his body and XXXX’s.
L5 – Don’t ever quit, don’t ever stop. Keep going. And I’m thankful that U.S. Missions would approve an assignment like that for a U.S. Missionary. And there’s other components there. I’m thankful that NorCal/Nevada would say, “Yeah, we want to get behind the XXXX’s” and support them, you know, in ministerial training as missionaries in Alaska. Believe it or not, we did run up against some folks in the lower 48 who’ve maybe just been up here in this setting and when they hear Alaska missions, they’ll say “Alaska’s not a mission.” I’m like, “Come, go with me.” It’s been important to me to get key leaders like Nollie and Malcolm, get them up here and get them off the road system. I took them out to Camp AN and no more questions asked, it was kind of like they got it.

I – Because you can’t just drive there. Planes, trains, and automobiles.

L5 – We had a young person grow up in Alaska, I mean grow up in Anchorage here. And last year she went to Camp AN to help and you know she came back and was blown away, eyes wide open. She’s like “Everybody needs to go out there. That’s more missions than some of the missions I’ve been to in a foreign country”. She goes, “That is crazy out there.” She goes, “That’s my back yard and I didn’t even know.” She goes, “I just didn’t”…and until you’ve experienced it, you have no…If your context is Anchorage maybe you would conclude that Alaska doesn’t need help with missions. But even Anchorage is missions, right?

I – It is. Our city needs help.

L5 – So is your project giving you the opportunity to get out, have you been out to any of the communities?

I – I have not. XXXX was able to go with XXXX to XXXX.

L5 – That’s right, he did, didn’t he.

I – And he loved it. He loved it. And he’s adventurous with food so he thought it was great. I have a bad stomach so when my turn comes I’m going to have to be careful.

L5 – It’s hard for me. It’s hard for me and you know, obviously Cindy. When I lived in Nome, I did a lot of traveling out out there. Of course I was much younger then, much more nimble and flexible, so I…sleeping bag, small pillow, and just a change of clothes and off you go. But I never travelled that I didn’t take a couple of Alaska Natives with me. I had a Native young man that always went with me and then I had a Native lady that was actually a little older than me and she was a…she called me her son. I don’t think I was old enough to be her son, but I was close. I mean she was old enough for me to be her son, but it was close. Both of those got saved under our ministry early but XXXX would go with me, and I mean you talk about taking care of you, you know she’d say, she’d just tell me “You don’t eat that. You don’t have to eat that.” And she goes, “You might want to try that but just a little bit.” So I was always very, very careful. Early I got really, really sick. It was XXXX. XXXX wasn’t pastor out there then. He had just gotten
saved actually. Man, I got so, so sick. I mean I come home and I ended up being sick off and on for about 3 weeks. I got food poisoning. It was the worst thing I’ve ever experienced. The way my stomach hurt, I mean just to think about it now is painful. It was bad and I limped into the hospital and the doctor, she’s like “Pastor XXXX you’ve got food poisoning.” She said, “We’ll get you over the hump but,” she said, “you’re going to struggle with this for days.” She said, “It will lift. You’re going to feel fine and then all of a sudden, it’s going to hit you again.” She said, “You got something tainted out there.” So, after that, it kind of put a…so I think the thing you do is you find what you can taste, I mean they cook a lot of western food out there. They boil chickens and turkeys and you know they…in a lot of ways they eat the way we do. But when they pull out their traditional foods, you know that’s where I always had to be careful. I think what happened to me was, I don’t really know, but we had one morning for breakfast we had herring eggs on kelp on toast. And I like herring eggs, but I knew these herring eggs didn’t taste quite right. And come to find out they were fermented. They probably were bad and I don’t know why nobody else was getting sick but XXXX explained their systems are cut for it. But I thought it was the taste of death to me. But good, I’m glad XXXX got to go, yeah. I saw a couple pictures of them, XXXX or XXXX, out in the…

I – He was with XXXX.

L5 – Did they go get a seal or something? Or go shoot something?

I – They went fishing pulling the nets in with XXXX. So they, they just had a blast. And he can’t wait to go to another one. There’s a village that Pastor XXXX is going to take XXXX to, can’t remember the name of it. And he just can’t wait. He’s excited.

L5 – North? South?

I – I don’t remember.

L5 – Oh, XXXX is wanting to get in to XXXX.

I – I think that’s it.

L5 – Yeah, we were talking about XXXX. I told him last spring in an interview then, they’ve been without a pastor. We’ve had missionaries in and out of there but that’s been forever. We’ve got a lady up there that’s been holding the fort down so to speak, and we had our little developing assembly meeting conference call with her back in end of march I think it was. And it just broke me. I told those guys I said, “This time next year I cannot sit through another phone conversation with her, listening to this. God has got to give us a pastor. If we’re in the same position this time next year in XXXX with XXXX, I am not here for that conversation.” I just told them God’s gotta come through. It was painful. I hung up and cried. You know and just…it’s probably as close to what we might could have got, we might could get to when in the Book of Acts and Paul and the Macedonian call. He heard the cry from one come over and help
us. Wow. It definitely rang in my heart that and for several days I was a wreck. All I could think about that those guys were going in to Easter and they don’t have a pastor. So XXXX started jumping through hoops to figure out a way to have something for them Easter Sunday. I think, I recall, he told me that if it was OK, he would like to take XXXX with him and I told him it was ok.

I – They haven’t been able to go yet. I guess it fell through with XXXX I think is what you said…So they haven’t been able to make it out there.

L5 – She, what they’re dealing with, she’s doing work on the building. She wants the place to be nice. That just tells you the kind of lady she is. She’s getting older and she doesn’t know how much longer she can do it. I don’t know exactly for sure how old XXXX is but I’m willing to guess she might be late 60s. This woman has driven the haul road in the winter time. The ice road. And went into Fairbanks with her truck and bought materials for the church and hauled it back. That’s the kind of lady she is. So you get up there, I think it’s XXXX. You get to XXXX you gotta take the road back to XXXX so if you don’t have a XXXX driver’s license, they won’t let you leave XXXX. They have a checking station there. Because they don’t want anyone, not that they don’t want outsiders there, they just don’t want anyone to drive that ice road. That’s how tricky that one is. It’s out in western Alaska the Iditarod, they’ll mark that trail. There’s a lot of other trails out there and they’re not marked. And those people commute between villages and communities. And so I understand that that ice road from XXXX or XXXX wherever that goes from down to XXXX I understand it’s not marked.

I – So if you don’t know where you’re going…

L5 – No, it’s probably flat. They’re accustomed to reading the trail, the terrain. So that would be quite an experience. All right, well thank you very much.

I – Thank you.
Appendix R

**Description of Terms/Themes**

Relational: local, approachable, consistent, fellowship,

Flexibility: mobility, portability, adaptability

Empowering: supportive, encouraging, building confidence

Practical: useful, use in everyday life or ministry

Financially feasible: affordable, cost effective