

usinkaaq (N), Puusinkaaq (S), Agayuwim PatReitaa (N), Agayuwim PatRiitaa (S)

AGAYUWIGMI PAUSINKAAQ AMLERTAARTUT. – THERE ARE MANY ICONS IN THE CHURCH.



Photo: Mary Peterson and family member beside icon corner decorated for Christmas. Courtesy of the Simeonoff family.

An icon is a religious image. It may be a painting, a carving, or a statue that depicts a spiritually important figure such as Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints, or angels. The veneration of icons is a central part of Russian Orthodox worship. Each image is thought to reflect the wondrous work of God spoken through the beauty of art. In Alutiiq, one variant for icon, *agayuwim patriitaa*, literally means “the church’s picture.” The words *pausinkaaq* or *puusinkaaq* are related to the Russian word for “god”.

In Alutiiq communities, icons are found both in churches and in people’s houses. Although icons may be displayed in any room, many orthodox homes have an icon corner in the living room. Family members begin their days by facing this corner to say prayers. The presence of icons also ensures that positive images surround a family during daily activities.

In Alutiiq homes, icons of Saint Herman, a beloved Orthodox priest, are especially common. An oil lamp often hangs with the icons. It is suspended from the ceiling on a chain and lit for special occasions. And during the Christmas holidays, the icon corner may be decorated with colorful paper and ornaments.

Icons have been part of Alutiiq homes for over a hundred years. In sod houses of the early twentieth century, icons hung from a corner of the main room, lit by a candle on a filigree chain.

The endurance of this prominent religious display illustrates the importance of orthodoxy to Alutiiq families.