

## Pray — Agayuluni

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AGAYUTAARTUT QAWARPAILAMENG. – THEY ALWAYS PRAY BEFORE THEY GO TO SLEEP.

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Photo: Man praying in the Karluk Church, 1959.  
Clyda Christiansen Collection, AM680:52.

In the Alutiiq language—*agayuluni*—means sacred. Today people use this term to describe Christian prayer or holding a church service. This term expresses a core Alutiiq value, the practice of spiritual faith.

In its broadest sense, prayer is a form of communication. It is any activity that seeks to create a connection with the sacred—a deity or a divine ancestor. Around the world, people praise, thank, and seek assistance from immortal beings. This act is at the heart of religious practice and it takes many forms. Prayer can involve quiet meditation and recitation, or energetic song and dancing. Some cultures chant or gesture, kneel, or bow as part of praying. Some participate in cleansing rituals or make offerings to the holy. Whatever ways people interact with the divine, prayer is a human universal. It is a part of all cultures.

In classical Alutiiq society, people communicated with the powerful unseen world in both daily life and at special community gatherings. For example, hunters carried amulets to heighten their connections with the spiritual and promote hunting success. They also returned parts of the animals they captured to the land or water, to care for their spirits and ensure rebirth. In the winter months, families hosted festivals where people gathered to visit, feast, honor ancestors, and thank the spirits that provided for human needs. Through singing and dancing, they invited sacred beings to these gatherings to honor their gifts and perpetuate life. For example, a song collected in Eagle Harbor in 1872 says,

*Where I go, you go, helper spirit.*

*You don't know where I will come from, the land of the sea.*

*As I travel the universe, helper spirit, protect me.*

In the eighteenth century, clergy members introduced the Russian Orthodox faith to the Alutiiq people and with it, Christian forms of prayer. As part of this effort, Alutiiq men trained in the Russian language translated church texts into Alutiiq. Written with Cyrillic characters these texts are some of the oldest examples of the Alutiiq language. They include the Lord's Prayer, published in 1816 in Alutiiq.