

About Bethel

The Yukon-Kuskokwim (YK) delta of Southwestern Alaska is the ancestral home of the Yup'ik and Cup'ik people who established the village of Mamterillermiut on the east bank of the Kuskokwim River. In the 1800s, missionaries facilitated the relocation of the village to the west bank, where Bethel now stands. The first Jesuit Volunteers (JVs) arrived in Bethel in 1965. With a population of 6,500, Bethel serves as the commercial hub for the 56 villages in the YK delta. Like Bethel, these villages are only accessible by plane, boat, or (in the winter) snow machine. Most Bethel residents are Yup'ik or Cup'ik and use traditional subsistence hunting and gathering practices. As the largest populated settlement in Western Alaska, Bethel is a key point of access to services. In addition, climate change is threatening the health of the tundra and disrupting the subsistence way of life. JVs assist agencies serving folks from primarily rural Alaska Native communities, alleviating some of the barriers posed by systemic marginalization, remote locality, and ecological crises.



Bethel, Alaska

Joys of Bethel

Living in Bethel offers a cross-cultural experience in a part of the world known to few outside of Alaska. JVs learn about Yup'ik culture and history, and live very closely with the land. Between the spacious tundra, vibrant sunrises and sunsets, and views of the Aurora Borealis, JVs are surrounded by nature's power and beauty. Each year Bethel hosts the Kuskokwim 300. JVs typically volunteer along the racecourse. Bethel is a dynamic, tight-knit community full of events, groups, and activities. JVs have a wide support and social network, including many Former JVs (FJVs) who still live and work in Bethel. Living in Bethel you will create a strong, steadfast community that will last you a lifetime.