

Nauyaq (Sea Gull)

Valeria Sherard, the one for whom the Alaska state mission offering is named, was a true pioneer and Christian advocate for Native Alaskans. Born to Christian parents, Valeria was baptized at the age of 12 and began teaching Sunday school at 17 years of age. With a goal of a

master's degree in library science, her intent was to work at the United States government library, but finances prevented that ultimate goal. Instead, she received a teaching degree from Blue Mountain College. Upon graduation, Valeria taught school until the death of her father at which time she felt a strong call to the mission field. To prepare herself, she attended seminary in New Orleans and received a Master of Religious Education degree. She arrived in Alaska as a summer missionary, serving first at a church in Anchorage, where she lived for three years. It was during this time she felt a God's strong call to give her time and energy in reaching the Native people for Christ. Moves to Kotzebue, Selawik, Sitka and Kiana followed, as Valeria allowed God to direct her path. She relocated to Anchorage in the mid-1980s and began working as a volunteer in the U.S. Public Native Health Hospital where she was known to many for her work in the villages. She retired in 1990 after 35 years as a career missionary, and moved back to her native Mississippi in 1999 when her health began to fail. Valeria died March 17, 2007.

