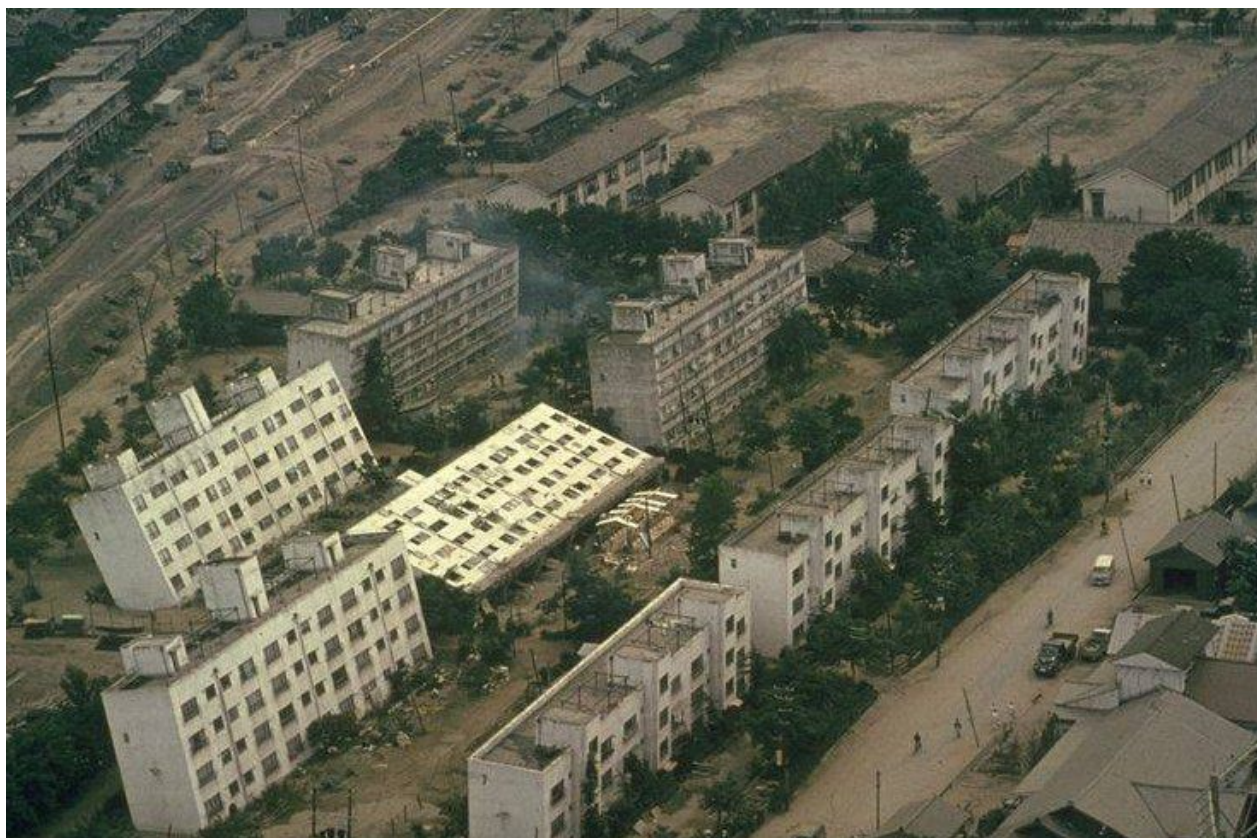




## Statewide Tolling-of-the-Bells to commemorate Great Alaska Earthquake

Bells will ring out all across Alaska at 5:36 p.m. March 27 to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Alaska Earthquake. The Magnitude 9.2 quake, which struck at that time in 1964, caused widespread damage including the loss of lives and destruction of villages.



Through the impetus of a few individuals and the support of the state legislature and the Alaska Orthodox Christian Church, the idea will finally recognize the history and personal sacrifice of this forgotten moment.

Several months ago, an “aha phenomenon” about the bells came to Chuck Volanti of Olympia, Wash., a former Alaska Air National Guard flight dispatcher. “I got up one morning and felt the need to do something about the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the earthquake,” he said in a recent phone interview. He set about contacting media and government representatives – wrote the governor and sent a letter to each member of the state legislature. Through the support of Rep. Doug Isaacson of North Pole and Rep. Cherisse Millett of Anchorage, the result was HJR 23 – “Proclaiming March 27, 2014 as Good Friday Earthquake Remembrance Day” – which passed unanimously and was signed by Gov. Sean Parnell on March 4.

During the course of his crusade, Volanti kept thinking, “What is it that would make this a moment in time that would memorialize the event and honor the citizens of the state of Alaska?” A proclamation on paper is one thing, but bells would give it voice. One thing led to another and the next thing he knew Volanti was



talking about bells with Deacon Paul Erickson of St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church in Juneau.

They agreed that a statewide tolling of the bells led by Alaska's historic Orthodox churches would cause people to take notice. Alaska's new bishop, His Grace Bishop DAVID (Mahaffey), liked the idea. He sent a letter to each of Alaska's approximately 85 parishes asking them to ring the bells at the historic moment.

The bells will be rung in a full peeling, in the Russian, "Trezvon," of all the bells of the church, beginning at 5:34 p.m. for two minutes, followed by two minutes of silence at 5:36 p.m., and then two minutes of tolling (one strike every ten seconds) on the largest bell. The two minutes before the quake to represent the ongoing life of Alaskans before the quake, the two minutes of silence and the two minutes of tolling for the four minutes the quake actually lasted.

"In this way, we will pay honor to both the living and the dead who were a part of that historic event in the life of the state of Alaska," the Bishop wrote.

The bishop also presented this request to Alaska's church leaders from other major faiths. It is hoped that all will join in the ringing of the bells.

The Great Alaska Earthquake – "Good Friday Earthquake" – was the most powerful recorded in U.S. and North American history. Some 139 lives were lost. Areas near Kodiak were raised by 30 feet and areas near Portage dropped as much as 8 feet.

The quake affected a number of Orthodox villages. A 27-foot tsunami destroyed Chenega, whose village published a book "The Day that Cries Forever." Kaguyak and Afognak villages were destroyed. In Old Harbor, the entire village was destroyed except for the Orthodox church.

Anchorage and environs took a hard hit as well, especially downtown, Turnagain and out along the Turnagain Arm to Portage.

In Valdez, the city harbor and docks collapsed. This is a part of the story that especially affected Chuck Volanti, because he lost four good friends in connection with a National Guard operation in days subsequent to the quake. Killed in the related plane crash April 27, 1964, were Maj. Gen. Thomas P. Carroll, adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard; pilot Lt. Col. Thomas Norris Sr.; co-pilot Maj. James Rowe; and flight engineer Tech. Sgt. Kenneth Ayers.

**Source:** [The Diocese of Alaska](#)