

2020 AIN Communiqué: The impacts of the coronavirus outbreak on Indigenous communities

The Anglican Indigenous Network (AIN) is an international community of faithful Indigenous Anglicans. We gather every two years for sacred conversations, meaningful worship, cultural exchange, fellowship, and to provide mutual support as we strategically plan our future together.

As we gathered together in fellowship via zoom at the end of March 2020 in the midst of COVID-19, we each shared the impacts the coronavirus outbreak has had on our communities. We acknowledge within the AIN that the impacts will be devastating. Indigenous peoples continue to suffer the effects of colonialism and are minorities in own lands, contributing to substantive social vulnerabilities cause by lack of equitable access to healthcare, adequate sanitation protocols, and in many cases lack of electricity. The added pressures of the epidemic on already limited and restricted resources constitute an extension of historical genocide under the ongoing forces of occupation. As a result of institutional racism and economic disparities within each of our provinces, COVID-19 will result in the intensification of the inequities Indigenous peoples face daily.

We share these stories with our brothers and sisters in the Anglican Communion worldwide in order to highlight what we already know is true and part of our daily experience as Indigenous peoples. We encourage each of our provinces to advocate for responses to COVID-19 that are equitable; that acknowledge and respond to already existing inequalities in how Indigenous communities are served, and how historically vulnerable Indigenous communities will be significantly impacted by COVID-19.

Archbishop Mark MacDonald, Primate, Turtle Island, Canada

Here on Turtle Island in the area called Canada, Indigenous communities are facing some rather steep challenges. Because of many years of radically short funding of basic infrastructure in Indigenous communities, some of the basic elements of good health - adequate nutritious food, adequate housing, clean water, and available health services - are unavailable in the majority of Indigenous communities. Because of their isolation and remoteness, there is great fear that, if the virus came to these communities, they would be in dangerous vulnerability. This vulnerability exists for Indigenous people living in urban areas, as well, created by the poverty that is the constant companion of most Indigenous people, either directly or through their extended family.

Virtually all Indigenous communities have restricted or shut down access, restricting flights and closing winter roads on the ice (which is the necessary way for most of the goods and services to arrive in these communities). In addition they are closing down Indigenous government offices and restricting gatherings for worship and other ceremonies. Church leaders are often restricted from contact but are, at the same time, providing an increased level of pastoral care for their community with fewer resources. Some have looked to social media and others rely on phone systems.

The elders tell of times in years past when they faced similar conditions. Some are going out on the land to live the traditional lifestyle and to pray for the people. Some are going out to hunt, hoping to provide extra food, if conditions make getting other foods difficult. Many remind the people that they faced a massive wave of sickness when Europeans came and know how to protect their communities and survive. All are calling for prayer.

The Rev. Dr. Bradley Hauff, Missioner for Indigenous Ministries, Episcopal Church, USA

The COVID-19 (or coronavirus) pandemic poses a dangerous threat to our Indigenous communities in the United States due to two principal factors: the lack of adequate medical care resources, and the vulnerabilities of the people due to their social and physical conditions.

The Indian Health Service (IHS), which has struggled since its inception to serve the medical needs of Indigenous Americans, is in no way prepared to respond as it should to the potential influx of COVID-19 infected patients. This pertains to the patient capacity of its hospitals, the availability of its testing kits and medical supplies, and its ability to quarantine patients. This factor, combined with the fact that many Indigenous people are already living with chronic health conditions, such as diabetes (which as underlying factors may exacerbate the effects of a COVID-19 infection) and the geographical distances between Indigenous residents and their hospitals and medical facilities, amount to a grim prospect – COVID-19 could claim a statistically higher rate of lives in proportion to that of the general U.S. population. Our elders, who have mobility issues and weakened immune systems, are particularly at risk. On many reservations, food and water supplies are challenging to maintain even during normal conditions.

Some tribal councils, such as that of the Navajo nation, have discouraged non-residents from entering their reservations during this time and may ban them from doing so. Many reservations are currently on Shelter-in Place orders which prohibit non-essential work, school attendance, and any social gatherings of more than ten people. The closing of schools poses a problem to Indigenous children who rely on school lunch as their primary source of nutrition, so churches and other organizations are working to provide food for their people.

Long term economic problems will probably also occur, as casinos (a primary revenue source for many tribes) are closed during lockdowns and Shelter-in-Place orders. This will likely result in an increase in poverty across tribes. Small tribal communities in remote areas, such as Alaska, are not any safer than anywhere else, because once the virus enters their villages it will be difficult to contain, and the people will be very distant from sources of help. These types of areas are extraordinarily vulnerable.

I recently had a Zoom meeting with about 20 of my office's constituents across the Episcopal Church to discuss these concerns. I have decided to do this weekly to give us all an opportunity to talk about what we're going through, help and

encourage one another, and pray together. We will continue to do this until the threat is quelled and probably beyond that.

I heard from the people of St. Elizabeth's, White Rocks, Utah (Ute) that they are engaged in a feeding ministry for children and elders. Navajoland is also doing this within its congregations. All of the Indigenous Episcopal clergy are intentionally reaching out to the elders, checking up on them to see how they are doing. Most have social media pages, and these are being used now as a major means of communication.

The situation has forced our congregations to look at doing church differently. Right now there are several congregations, such as Trinity, Everett, Washington, and St. James, Canonball, North Dakota (Standing Rock Sioux), that are broadcasting live services on social media. Holy Apostles, Oneida, Wisconsin, is also doing so and has produced online liturgies to be shared among Indigenous congregations.

One way that my office can help is by sharing this technology with congregations that have not yet been implementing it. The forced cancellation of in-person events such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has been a discouragement to our people, and our summer convocations and even the Episcopal Youth Event, to which we were planning to send a group of Native youth, are now dubious. But holding virtual events, with the help of online technology, is something that we can do and should help one another to implement. In that sense the pandemic is forcing us to do church, and be the church, in a new way.

Kalani Holokai, Episcopal Church of Hawai'i

Aloha from Hawai'i~

Many blessings to all of you, my 'ohana in the Anglican Indigenous Network, These last 3 weeks, especially, I have been so involved in the work in public health to prevent, contain and mitigate COVID-19 that I've barely had time to look up.

My last Sunday in church at St. John's Kula was on March 8, the second Sunday in Lent. The Rev. Kerith Harding asked the congregation in both services to pray for me as I had shared with her that I was very busy in my job in public health as we were trying to prevent the spread of COVID-19. I didn't know she was going to ask the congregation to pray for me and over me (no touching), I was humbled. I also immediately felt a strength that I knew I was going to lean on in the days ahead. I am very grateful.

COVID-19 has indeed stressed and distressed our communities and neighborhoods, not just here in Maui County, throughout Hawaii. Sometimes listening to the news of this virus, its spread, and the numbers of sick people and those who've died is enough to just turn off the TV. And I've done that to keep my mind focused on where I am needed and what God wants to show me.

I was driving through a beach site on my way to work and saw the numbers of homeless people there, parked on the side of the road, abandoned cars, dirty

conditions, and I realized that it was always like this in this homeless camp. I lifted them up in prayer.

In reality, though I haven't spent much time looking at how this is affecting our indigenous people, per se I have noticed how it is affecting all of us. Bishop Robert Fitzpatrick has done a very good job keeping us informed, not just about what the Diocese is doing to prevent the spread, but also by providing information and updates to help us plan for the days ahead, and in ways to stay healthy, hopeful and engaged. Many of our churches are providing virtual services, St. John's Kula, where I have been interning, and Holy Innocent's Lahaina, Maui, where Rev. John Hau'oli Tomoso has been supplying.¹

A Cup of Cold Water, our ministry on Maui Island to the homeless and unsheltered has been suspended temporarily. We did all we could to keep this going but the risks not just for those we serve, also for those who are serving together, we had no choice but to put this on hold. We continue to lift up in prayer all of our relatives on the streets and in the bushes, sheltering wherever they can, asking for God's peace to be with them; asking for God's wisdom to show them where they can find what they need and how to gratefully attain it; and asking for joy to be restored to them real soon.

I'm aware many of our indigenous brothers and sisters work in the travel industry (as I did for 25 years previously), food service and social service agencies. Hours have been cut due to less travellers, work has been put on hold with no pay, restaurants are closed to diners and offer take-out only, and hotels are closing for the duration. Some workplaces are offering work-at-home, while others are not able to due to the nature of their businesses. According to one of our Hawaii newspapers, our unemployment rate soared past 10% the other day with more than 58,000 people out of work and filing claims (that's about one-third of Maui island's population).²

As much as there is concern for us to shelter in place, our social service agencies are mindful of the added distress it puts on our mental health and especially for those who may be lonely and alone. In my recent work at a quarantine site, I was mindful of this, and we offered a resource. I also took a leap of faith and asked our client if he attended church, and he said he and his wife have been on attending their virtual church daily. Mahalo ke Akua. I believe this is how they endured their quarantine.

There seems to be hope, in the ways people are coming together-the calls I receive at my office from people who want to volunteer their time; and others

¹ See for example: <https://www.episcopalhawaii.org/coronavirus.html>

² I've included some links to share the stories and information shared here:

<https://www.mauicounty.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=9951>

<https://www.mauicounty.gov/2370/COVID-19-Coronavirus-Information>

<https://health.hawaii.gov/coronavirusdisease2019/>

<https://kanuhawaii.galaxydigital.com/covid-19-respond-with-aloha/>

<https://mauinow.com/2020/03/18/mayor-victorino-announces-public-health-emergency-rules-for-maui-county/>

creating ways to rally resources and help for the larger good. There are stories of people making masks, shields, providing meals for the homebound, caring for the elderly, providing more services and shelter for the homeless...supplies...this must be God.

All of our resources are being challenged -- Emergency Management Operations, public health offices, hospitals, Salvation Army, Red Cross, Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD), Feed My Sheep, Goodwill, ...all our first responders, their families. I don't even know how many or who they are, and many are hearing the call to find ways to help others. Mahalo ke Akua~ For all of us, a reflection offered by our prayer warrior for A Cup of Cold Water ministry, and ironically a week later by our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry:

Pandemic

What if you thought of it,
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.
And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.
Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.
(By Lynn Ungar)³

Edward Bruce Hanohano (Episcopal Church of Hawai'i) believes that the COVID-19 pandemic has actually strengthened our collective faith in God, where people

³ <http://www.lynnungar.com/poems/pandemic/>

and communities have responded with love and kindness to their neighbour. The planet itself is breathing easier; “Our Mother Earth is taking in a deep breath of life and a sigh of relief as human degradation of the planet has slowed.” He says also, “I hope and pray that when this episode in the life of the world is over, people worldwide will ‘wake up and smell the roses’ and thank the Lord our God that we are still alive!”

Dr Rose Elu, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands, Australia

It has been quite a challenging time for our community here at Brisbane and the far north and Torres Strait Islands. Torres Strait has been very clear of this virus thank God as the leaders have taken various steps to avoid the effect of Covid-19. They have stopped visitors to NPA and Torres and follow the government procedures in place. They have closed the borders between PNG and Torres Strait so they are in a better position now apart from the whole nation. Hope they can stay clear of this deadly virus but knowing the strong faith of our people we all have our trust in the Lord. Same here for our community in Brisbane we stay strong together as well. Must say though it has been a big blow to our way of life.

I have been home bound for the last week or so working from home of course which keeps me busy. Please do uphold us all in your prayers.

Awgadhaw Woenab (God Bless)

Aunty

Rose Elu

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Worker Straits

Bishop Te Kitohi Pikaahu, Aotearoa / New Zealand

In Aotearoa, New Zealand, the ‘one size fits all’ response to the COVID-19 outbreak does not take into account the social and economic inequities faced by Maori whanau (families), hapu (sub-tribe) and iwi (tribe). Professor Papaarangi Reid (member of National Maori Pandemic Group) says, “We are still operating under the fallacy that one size fits all. A national programme, while necessary, will lead to exacerbate health inequities. While things are being done for the general population, they don’t have an equity lens, which is essential from the beginning.”⁴

Maori, along with other colonised Indigenous peoples worldwide, are disproportionately over represented in all the negative wellbeing indices, including health and social and economic indices of wellbeing. Maori are already living on the edge, living at the margins. Any further exacerbation of this ‘living on the edge’ will tip the scales for many, for most, Maori households. The impacts of COVID-19 on Maori whanau, hapu and iwi will be devastating.

Dr Rhys Jones says, “There are huge social and economic inequities as a result of colonisation and racism that has resulted in differential access to society’s goods

⁴ Professor Papaarangi Reid, Te Ropu Whakakaupapa Uruta, National Maori Pandemic Group, visited 28 March, 2020, <https://www.uruta.maori.nz/about-us>

and services. These are likely to be exacerbated as a result of the lockdown, for a number of reasons.”⁵

The impacts will include greater vulnerability to infection with already compromised health, potentially swift spread of infection within multigenerational households, loss of income from job losses and limited and delayed access to social services and benefits, communications and information challenges (because of lack of a phone/internet, or phone/internet credit) during a time where cellphone and internet communication for vital services is the new normal.

In response to this pandemic, some iwi (tribal areas) are implementing measures to secure their tribal boundaries, and putting in place a rahui (prohibiting access to a particular area) thereby limiting potential exposure to infection from visitors and non-residents during this period of lockdown. The rahui area can include waterways and bush, and some community facilities. Iwi and hapu leaders are particularly concerned with protecting the health of pakeke and kaumatua (elderly) within their communities. The small rural community of Pawarenga in the Far North has local people delivering packages of food to kaumatua and pakeke (elders) with basic items including a tray of eggs, flour, sugar, tea and coffee. A water tanker has also been distributing water to households who have been affected by the drought in the Pawarenga community. Volunteers are also ensuring that medication is collected for pakeke and kaumatua, as well as offering to pick up shopping and provisions in town for them.

The Maori Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand has responded to the lockdown by offering a variety of online options for fellowship and worship, including Sunday Eucharist service, daily morning prayer and even song, via livestreaming karakia (prayer) through the facebook pages of the different Amorangi (diocese).⁶

Bishop Kito and his team are also working closely with the New Zealand Police and other agencies to respond to the countries newly enforced restrictions on tangihanga (funeral), which severely impact our tikanga (customs) on how whanau and marae (tribal meeting house) respectfully farewell a loved one during this time of lock-down. Te Ropu Whakakaupapa Uruta (National Maori Pandemic Group) are advising whanau not to hold tangihanga, with the only options being immediate burial at urupa (cemetery), cremation, and closed coffins for anyone with a COVID-19 related death. The option of only immediate

⁵ Dr Rhys Jones, “NZ coronavirus lockdown – Expert Reaction,” site visited on 28 March 2020, <https://www.sciencemediacentre.co.nz/2020/03/23/nz-coronavirus-lockdown-expert-reaction/>

⁶ See links for examples of karakia services available from different Amorangi (diocese):
Te Pihopatanga o Te Tai Tokerau: <https://www.facebook.com/tepihopatangaotetaitokerau/>
Te Pihopatanga o Te Manawa o te Wheke: <https://www.facebook.com/ManawaOTeWheke/>
Te Pihopatanga o Te Tairāwhiti: <https://www.facebook.com/TairāwhitiAmorangi/>
Te Pihopatanga o te Upoko o te Ika: <https://www.facebook.com/UpokoAmorangi/>
Te Pihopatanga o Aotearoa: <https://www.facebook.com/pihopatanga/?tn-str=k%2AF>

whanau being able to come together to farewell their loved one in their own home, has recently changed so that even this is not possible. All public cemeteries are closed to the public, with the undertaker taking responsibility for transport of the tupapaku (deceased person) to the cemetery, and immediately transferring the tupapaku into the hands of the cemetery staff for burial.

For some within hapu and iwi, there are tupapaku (deceased person) already waiting in mortuaries for burial and awaiting decisions on how the burial will be handled, or whether the body will be held over until the lockdown has ended. One of our Minita-a-iwi (community lay minister) expresses the deep sadness of the impacts of COVID-19 on whanau, "The practice of isolation is foreign for our grieving whanau [family]. Whanau were upset of course with our decision to close the marae (tribal meeting house) but as a trustee I too could not accept the risk placing more whanau in a vulnerable position."⁷

This has also necessitated the development of resources for whanau to conduct their own service (memorial) and be able to farewell their loved one in a faith-filled way in their own home and via online apps, in particular when ministers are not able to be present in providing a tangihanga service for the whanau. Bishop Kito and his team, along with others within the amorangi and diocese, are currently in the process of producing resources for whanau to use at home to assist them in providing a respectful and loving poroporoaki (farewell) for their loved one.

Why share our stories?

The global pandemic of the coronavirus has caused an international trauma for all peoples. Indigenous peoples in every nation are disproportionately affected due to the continuing effect of colonialism that contribute to current realities of environmental and systemic racism, disparities in quality and access to healthcare, and social distancing requirements that are further preventing indigenous peoples from connecting to their greatest resource in times of social crisis – one another.

Lack of the basic infrastructure in rural areas makes the use of technological communications impracticable for many indigenous communities, which serves to highlight longstanding social inequalities in underserved areas. Indigenous communities in every nation need the help and support of the social and spiritual network that is The Anglican Communion. Through social justice advocacy, relief funding, and providing for basic infrastructure for healthcare resources and communication, the Church has an historic opportunity to help right the wrongs of the past and current times. And that time is upon us all.

Let us pray together:
Gracious Creator,
we give thanks to You for the beauty and abundance of the Earth.

⁷ Henare Waaka, St. John's Theological College student and Minita-a-whanau leader for Te Pihopatanga o Te Manawa o te Wheke, and Trustee of Kaiatemata Marae, Ngati Haua, 27 May 2020.

May all the peoples of the Earth be blessed with healing,
and may joy embrace sorrow like a friend returning home - that all balance may
be restored and peace return to the hearts of all.

Thank you, Creator for hearing our prayer - may we carry your healing peace
within us that our love for all that you have made may help us bring healing to all
your peoples.

In Christ's name.

Amen.

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