FROM THE DIRECTOR

CNAMF started this year excited about our grantees and their projects. We awarded funding to seven organizations across the country for exciting projects focused on community self-determination and sustainability. We began putting the building blocks in place to develop new programs and laid plans for increased community interaction throughout the year. Today, we remain on that path, but from guarded comfort of our computer screens as we work from makeshift home offices.

Situations have changed dramatically over the past few weeks as our world faces challenging times. We maintain abundant faith and lean on each other as we re-examine our travels, our environment, our interactions. We do not forget we are in the midst of the Lenten season, a time of self-re-examination and reflection. CNAMF staff is in regular contact with our grantees and are happy to hear their communities are implementing the precautions prescribed by our local and national health professionals.

An exciting project to share with all is the opportunity we had to identify a new office space and will have completed the move by the time you receive this newsletter. The new space is more centrally located in Tempe, close to Arizona State University, where we hope to engage in collaborative projects in the coming years. We will plan an Open House event sometime this summer when we are all safe and out of immediate exposure to contaminants.

We are upon Easter, upon a new season, giving thanks for the renewal of life. We are prayerful and grateful for the teachings that guide us through these trying times. Please take a few moments to give thanks and pray for the Lord’s protective hedge for our health workers, first responders and those individuals putting their health on the line to serve others.

As well, please take some time during this Lenten season to reflect and reaffirm your commitment to your beliefs as we prepare to celebrate Christ’s resurrection. We are, indeed, blessed to continue Charles Cook’s legacy through our work at CNAMF.

Romans 5: 2-5

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Wendy Weston
Executive Director/CEO
Cook Native American Ministries Foundation
On Wednesday, February 19, members and clergy from the American Indian churches located within the Presbytery of Grand Canyon and Presbytery de Cristo convened in the village of Stotonic, Gila River Indian Community, Arizona to learn about the results of a project recently completed by PCUSA. Steve Hirsch, Coordinator for Native American Church properties provided an update of the assessments that were conducted over this past year on the nearly 100 Presbyterian churches across Indian country, many in rural areas. A great number of these churches are in need of repair and this assessment will allow a plan to be developed to assist the churches in receiving assistance to realize renovation projects. Hirsch’s findings will be presented to the 224th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA for review and discussion.

Following the presentation, attendees shared a lunch provided by a local O’odham caterer. For the remainder of the lunch period, Irvin Porter, a member of the Gila River Indian Community who also serves as the Associate for Native American Congregational Support for the PCUSA, conducted a worship session.

The afternoon session was entitled The Native American Boarding Schools: Intergenerational Trauma Realities in Native American Families. Participants viewed a screening of Dawnland, a PBS documentary about the Indian Child Welfare Act and the untold story of the removal of Indigenous children in the US through the nation’s first-ever government endorsed truth and reconciliation commission, that investigated the devastating impact of the state of Maine’s child welfare practices on the Wabanaki people.

Following the film, the group engaged in a Talking Circle style discussion on intergenerational trauma and how it has impacted our tribal communities. Participants shared their personal stories of the boarding school experience and how it affected themselves or their families. The Presbyterian Church, USA’s office of Native American Congregational Support feels it is important for tribal people to share these memories, as a positive way to achieve reconciliation and peace as we move forward together. At the end of the day, the group gathered in prayer and everyone left, knowing their contribution to the discussion was important to our understating and healing.

Below are summaries of our 2020 CNAMF Grant Awardees. The CNAMF Grant Committee is confident these funded projects will have an impact on the communities they will take place in.

Native Chaplaincy Alliance, Rocky Boy, Montana – in an effort to bridge the gap between the secular and spiritual environments of life within Native communities, the Native Chaplain alliance will recruit and train Native chaplains to teach the Fatherhood is Sacred/Motherhood is Sacred, Linking Generations by Strengthening Relationships and Addressing Family Violence curriculum, developed by Native American Fatherhood and Families Association. Identified students are from remote reservation communities in Montana, Idaho and Washington on the healing journey and seeking spiritual and life skill training.

Healing Circle Drop-in Center, Shiprock, New Mexico - towards support of its Providing Skills For Success Program, aimed at working with youth and young adults who have faced challenges in obtaining a high school education or are struggling with post-secondary education. The program utilizes the six directional components of Navajo spirituality, alongside Christian beliefs, to ground the students, restore self-confidence and achieve success in education or a career path.

Kingdom Workers, Waukesha, Wisconsin – will conduct a youth gardening project in Whiteriver, Arizona, where White Mountain Apache youth will have the opportunity to learn the basics of sustenance gardening and how this can address issues of obesity, diabetes, and depression. Youth participants will learn the importance of proper nutrition, leadership skills, land stewardship, relationships and developing strong work ethics that lead to community stability.

Living Water Food Pantry and Resource Center, Cherokee, North Carolina - recognizing the need for nutritional food sources in pockets of impoverished communities, the Community Outreach ministry of Living Waters Lutheran Church will be able to continue to offer assistance to those who may have specific dietary concerns or are unable to physically come to the church for assistance. Clients are also encouraged to learn about nutrition, in addition to receiving counseling and assistance in joining the work force or seeking educational opportunities.

Native American Urban Ministry, Phoenix, Arizona – funds will allow the NAUM to launch “Elders and Youth, Leaders Together”, a project that will serve inner city Natives from multiple generations and varied life experiences. Elders and youth will be paired up to learn from one another by engaging in community service and leadership training projects and sharing cultural and spiritual experiences. At the center is the notion of Christian fellowship that will allow youth and elders to build supportive and long-lasting relationships.

St. John’s United Methodist Church, Bridgeton, New Jersey – will develop and offer an afterschool program to serve young teens from local tribes including Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape and Powhatan Renape Nations. A certified teacher, along with Native high school scholars will mentor and tutor students and provide homework assistance, literacy development, Native immersion and Study of Scripture over a 20-week period.

Wetlands Theological Educational Center, Gray, Louisiana – in response to desecration of the land through natural disaster, land erosion and pollution, the center will recreate sacred land spaces that will serve as a food, water and refuge for local wild life as well as sacred places for prayer and contemplation. Local tribal youth from the Atkapa Tribe of the Grand Bayou, Pointe au Chien, Grand Caillou and Isle de Jean Charles tribes will learn about traditional medicinal plants of the region and the connections created through faith, prayer and indigenous connections to sacred sites.

In addition, Cook Native American Ministries Foundation will provide continued funding to the Achena Indian Presbyterian Church in Maud, Oklahoma towards their efforts in organization and capacity development and to Three Precious Miracles from the Gila River Indian Community in Sacaton, Arizona for their tireless efforts to provide support and cultural resources to Native children who are in the Arizona foster care system.

These projects and programs collectively uphold the mission of CNAMF- To equip leaders to better serve their churches and communities.
Pastor Mary is an innovator. She is fiery, spirited, humorous and has a heart of gold. Her full name is Mary Louise Frenchman (Oglala Lakota) and she is Pastor of Native American Urban Ministry in Phoenix, Arizona. Pastor Mary is the first of our grantee leaders we will be highlighting in each issue of Indian Highways. Below, she shares her story of how she was called to this unique ministry:

Prior to becoming involved in a church and becoming a pastor most of my work was in the non-profit world. My first experience in church work was in San Francisco in 1995, all starting with a dream I had that spring. I dreamt of a church with steeples, where I envisioned myself standing, looking up at the steeples. A voice I believe was the Creator said to me, “Go higher in the church.” When I awoke, I thought nothing of the dream as I wasn’t involved in a church or attending church at the time.

In August of 1995, my brother came to visit me in Phoenix. He was on the Board of the Bay Area Native American Ministry and asked if I would do some grant writing for them. He also invited me to San Francisco to visit their program so I could learn more about what the projects they were involved in. I made the trip with my brother to San Francisco. As we were getting off the bus upon our arrival, my brother pointed and said, “the church is just right up here.” I looked over and it was the same church I had seen in my dreams. I was excited to share with him that I had dreamt of this church prior to my arrival. It was here that I spent the next 10 years conducting street ministry in the streets and bars of San Francisco.

I think Creator talks to us many ways. Sometimes we don’t listen and sometimes we do. This experience changed my life. I am forever grateful to have been brought up to listen to God within, our connection to universe. I would like to see more Native Americans utilize their inherent gifts. We are such powerful people because we generate energy that goes out to the universe. We are all gifted with our natural intuition, and other gifts that people call paranormal. Those are natural gifts from Creator and I believe it is in our DNA.

I don’t preach, I share messages. I believe the Holy Spirit is working through me. People I work with often remark, “she knows what the people need to hear.” I don’t think I know, rather I trust that my words will reach willing hearts. One thing I always do the night before I share a message is pray that my soul and the souls of the people who will be present the next morning, meet in the dream/spirit world.

So, when we meet the next morning, we already know each other at some level. It works.

When I was a small child in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, my grandmother was a natural leader in our community. She took care of her “tiospaye” extended family of community members. She had her ear to the ground. She always knew when someone was sick and would call upon me to take them soup. Grandma was crippled at birth, she had a bent leg bone that was never properly set so I did her running and delivery of food or messages. I learned compassion and being useful from her. Yet again, preparation for whatever Creator has planned for us.

When I started Native American Urban Ministries (NAUM) in Phoenix, I was thinking I would like to see this become a place where Native Americans could worship in a traditional manner with Christ centered worship, with communion, yet not so regimented or liturgical. I have worked with intergenerational grief and trauma since 1980 and know a bit about churches and Native peoples all over the world.

The most beautiful thing about our ministry is that Creator sends those most in need to us. What an honor that Creator chose me to minister to the wounded people, most of whom live on the streets, some just coming out of prison, lonely elders, families living on the edge. Everything I ever learned in non-profit work I use today in my ministry. I realize now I have been preparing for this work all my life.

Realizing the needs of our community prompted NAUM to start a clothing pantry, along with hygiene products and household items for people getting an apartment for the first time. We call it, “From Backpack to Unpack”. Our clients need everything from a broom and dustpan, to sheets, towels, cookware and dishes. NAUM provides a laundry basket with small garbage can, liners, toilet paper, laundry and dish-washing soap to those who come to us for the first time. We are happy to provide items that cannot be purchased with the state issued Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards.

Through our services at the Native American Urban Ministry, housed at Grace Lutheran Church in central Phoenix, we offer the following:

- Twice monthly worship services-soon to be weekly Saturday worship services with lunch
- An Elders program that meets twice a week. Since we pay rent for our usage at Grace Lutheran Church, twice weekly is within our budget.
- A women’s re-entry program: We welcome women being released from prison. We honor pickup requests as the women are dropped at a mall when they are released from prison. Most do not have a ride to their first destination. They are provided one month’s bus pass, hygiene products and clothing.
- Intergenerational Garden Project that allows Native youth and elders to grow, harvest and cook food from their garden.
- Pantry with clothes, household items, and hygiene products. We offer sewing kits that are assembled by the elders, all made to fit in a backpack or purse. Kits include needles, thread, safety pins, wood matches, band aids, Q tips and buttons.
- From Backpack to Unpack. (mentioned above)

We are grateful to Cook Native American Ministries Foundation for their support of our programs through this wonderful grant. This year, we will be able to serve an increased number of our Native brothers and sisters who are in need, as our Savior taught us.

Mary Louise Frenchman has lived in Phoenix since 1959. She graduated from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. She has worked at St. Paulus Lutheran Church & Bay Area N.A. Ministry, Living Waters Lutheran Church, Cherokee, North Carolina; Native American Urban Ministry, Phoenix, Arizona. She is the proud mother of twin daughters, has one granddaughter and two great grandchildren.

NAUM is a recipient of a grant for their Elders and Youth Together program.
Because of changes in the tax laws there is now a tax-friendly way to contribute to qualifying charities (like a faith-based organization such as CNAMF). In general, distributions from a traditional IRA are taxable in the year you receive them. But one exception to this rule is the Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). A QCD generally is a nontaxable distribution made directly by the trustee of your IRA to an organization eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions. You must be at least age 70 and 1/2 when the distribution is made. Also, you must have the same type of acknowledgment of your contribution as you would need to claim a deduction for a charitable contribution. (You can’t claim a charitable contribution deduction for an QCD not included in your income.)

This provision of the tax code may be of interest to taxpayers who are at least age 70 and 1/2 and have a traditional IRA. These individuals must take required minimum distributions from their IRA each year. Seniors in this position can now make charitable contributions while at the same time reducing their taxable income by directing the trustee of their IRA to make qualified charitable distributions (QCD), which count towards their minimum distribution.

For more information see IRS Publication 590-B and talk to your tax professional.