On behalf of the Cook Native American Ministries Foundation staff and Board, thank you for your continued prayers and support of the work we are doing in Native communities across the country.

This summer has been like no other in our lifetimes, as virtual meetings, conferences, worship services and educational opportunities are now the new normal. We have faith this will not be our situation in the long term as we take measures to ensure healthy living environments and follow CDC protocol.

Over the next few months, our Grants Committee will be reviewing the proposals for funding for the 2021 grant period. We are honored to serve as a resource for small churches and organizations that are struggling to care for their own and are sure our grants will look a little different from previous years, again, all part of the healing process we all so desperately need.

CNAMF staff has maintained regular contact with our grantees, always sending prayer and positive thoughts their way. Many of us are also experiencing anxiety and a sense of uncertainty. Again, prayer and continued communication through our social media platforms, phone calls, emails and texts allows us to offer support and be a resource to those we serve.

The civil and political unrest we all currently face in our country prompted staff to seek an uplifting way to address our challenges. Over the last month, we completed two prayer journeys out to the local tribal communities and urban religious centers to offer prayers for justice and healing at churches and sacred landmarks. We spent time at each location giving thanks for God’s love and guidance and asked for healing, compassion and tolerance in our communities, as well as honoring lives lost to the pandemic.

We ask for continued patience and for all to embrace the lessons we are learning about ourselves and others. Stay healthy and stay safe, we are in this together.

Wendy Weston
Executive Director/CEO
Cook Native American Ministries Foundation

**IRA Tax-Free Donations**

Did You Know That You Can Donate To Cook Native American Ministries Foundation by Using Your IRA?

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 a 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. Those 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 (QCDs), which count towards their minimum distribution.

For more information see IRS Publication 590-B and talk to your tax professional.
The Lowlander Center was formed 10 years ago to link Delta communities in Louisiana that are challenged by land loss, erosion, and cultural survival. Their work has been to reinvigorate historied and Tribal communities’ traditional ways and culture to give strength to the communities while faced with climate dislocation.

In the article below, Rev. Kristina Peterson, Facilitator from the Lowlander Center describes the impact the COVID 19 pandemic has had on their tribal communities.

Lowlander Center in conjunction with The First Peoples’ Conservation Council

COVID added another layer of difficulties to a region already coping with extreme land loss and diminished traditional foods. Once vibrant in-land communities the areas surrounding the Tribes of Pointe au Chien, Grand Bayou, Isle de Jean Charles and Grand Caillou-Dulac are now mostly water. The disappearing of their land is faster than any other place in the world due in part from the extraction and damage of oil and gas and the severity of storms brought on by rising seas and changes in climate.

The Tribes have had to rebound following multiple major and minor hurricanes and the BP oil disaster over the past 17 years. With each storm not only, homes need work but boats which are the source of transportation and livelihood have to be repaired along with the harvesting areas being restored and reseeded. The Tribes are engaged in oysters, crabs and shrimp harvesting which in former years was complimented with bounty from lush gardens and orchards. Due to the loss of land and water surrounding or occupying the space of the communities, gardens are a challenge and orchards are for the most part gone. Grand Bayou in Plaquemines Parish now is a community living above the water with access to the homes only by boat. (see National Geographic – Grand Bayou)

The Tribes have remained resourceful, imaginative and diligent in addressing the issues that are not only impacting their life’s ways but also that of the coast. The presence of the Tribes’ knowledge and passion for restoration has led to many innovations that have been shared with Tribes who are also experiencing displacement due to climate.

Impacts of COVID have resulted in markets and restaurants that normally would be purchasing the seafood harvest ceased to do so. This left a gap in income for the fishers. The stimulus packages were complicated for people who are self-employed and have very small business operations. The unemployment benefits and other protections never made it to the fishers and their crews. Paperwork and forms became a stumbling block without having access to computers and internet service.

Instead of small business help and support the fishers were left to imagine their own way through this crisis. Supplemental food that was offered elsewhere was not present or offered to the state’s Tribes. It took 3 months of advocacy for the first food ‘donation’ from the federal government to arrive at one Tribe through Second Harvest.

The Tribes, though grateful for the donation of food, wanted to again enjoy their traditions of self-sufficiency and mutual care within their communities. To address the issue of good healthy food and the lack of response by the government programs such as USDA to purchase local seafood, we decided to develop our own program. Through the funds obtained from Presbyterian Disaster and from Cook Native American Ministries Foundation, several tons of shrimp were purchased from the Tribal fishers and distributed to households who usually depended on the fishers for mutual care/aid. The funds the fishers received were able to resupply their fishing boats with fuel, salt and ice to continue to shrimp during the spring shrimp season – thus the gift and the investment continue to feed and serve the communities.

There is a possibility that during the next shrimp season that starts in August, this concept of distribution of healthy product will be able to continue with shrimp being purchased by some of the feeding programs in New Orleans. It is hoped that the USDA will include shrimp, oysters and crab in the government’s purchasing program from farmers and harvesters. The Tribes are working together for positive and healthy outcomes for themselves and for the wider Louisiana coastal region.
The COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe health and financial impact on communities across the country and across the world. During this time of the unknown and uncertainties, CNAMF staff has maintained constant communication with grantee organizations who are working diligently in their communities despite the challenges they face. We would like to share a letter from Ben Bushyhead, Chair of the Swain County Commissioners regarding the work of Reverend Jack Russell and Mrs. Lisa Russell from Living Waters Lutheran Church Food Pantry in Cherokee, North Carolina.

“Please accept this letter as a total endorsement of what Rev. Jack Russell and Mrs. Lisa Russell do, and have done, with the food pantry located at their church. Living Waters Lutheran Church (LWLC). I am Chairman of the Swain County Board of Commissioners. Swain County is adjacent to and includes part of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian (EBCI) Reservation.

The Living Waters Lutheran Church Food Pantry, in all its years of service to the community, has never turned anyone away who has need. This includes the enrolled members of the EBCI and the non-members living within the LWLC service area that includes Swain County. There are many non-enrolled members of the EBCI who go to the LWLC Food Pantry for their needs.

The LWLC Food Pantry has accomplished all they have done with no “governmental” assistance. This fact alone, allows them to do what they need to do to serve those needing service and avoid governmental restrictions. The Pantry staff, under its leader Mrs. Russell, takes special and personal interest in its clientele meeting all their needs, going above and beyond food.

When the Coronavirus hit our area full force, the EBCI blocked their roads allowing no one other than enrolled member onto the reservation. This effectively cut off non-enrolled members from Swain County to access the services of LWLC Food Pantry. Mrs. Russell knew in her heart there were still people in the Swain County area needing food and other services. She was not dismayed. Strengthening relationships with Swain County food programs, such as the Family Resource Center, the First Presbyterian Church, and other organizations distributing food, she sent food supplies to them. Wanting to ensure these groups had the extra food for Swain County citizens who were dependent upon the LWLC Food Pantry and knowing people who could not utilize the LWLC Food Pantry still had needs, Mrs. Russell not only split her rations from the area’s major distributor Manna Foods Inc., she took it upon herself to personally deliver food to these groups, whose representatives could not come onto the reservation to acquire the food.

It is difficult to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Living Waters Lutheran Church Food Pantry, for all they do for our citizens. Their commitment to serving all of God’s children with only love is a Christian model we would all be well served to replicate.”

Sincerely,

Ben Bushyhead, Chairman
Swain County Commissioners

In our conversations with Lisa Russell, she expressed gratitude for CNAMF funding because in addition to have the ability to purchase additional food supplies the CNAMF grant allowed her to purchase diapers for families that had been laid off from their employment and 2,000 masks to distribute to community members.
History Corner
by Della Peña

“Memories of Yesterday”

Many years have passed, from the old days of “Cook Bible School” to “Cook Native American Ministries Foundation”. Although we have had many name changes over the years, we continue to serve God, our Creator, Native communities and churches throughout the country.

We would like to share some thoughts and memories:

“I can still see all the students with laughter. I remember Janice Kamps, the music and choir teacher, giving me the Do-Re-Me’s. I cherish my memories, especially my adopted sister Shirley Johnson.”
- Barbara Johnson, Student

“Remembering all the friends I met at Cook, sharing laughter, songs, and prayers. God bless them!”
- Arlene Howard, Student

“As I finished my Pastoral Studies, I had my strongest vision dreams, given for my path to go out into the world and preach the gospel for Jesus Christ. I know they came from above for I am now serving Him in a church that loves God. The past is no longer, only the future, to shine in His Glorious light here on earth.”
- Rev. Annette Lewis, Student/Former Board Member

“So many I can’t even begin! Watching Michael Paul carve the story poles; Friendships for life; Chapel Services, holiday celebrations, Indian tacos!”
- Carol Allen (Brookes), Faculty

“My precious memory is how all people are loved of God. It was great to see the cultures of the various tribes.”
- Alvin & Clarella Van Marel, Volunteers

“When I was 8 years old, a play organized by the youth group, the “Wizard of Oz”, was held in Dexter Hall Chapel; I was the cowardly lion. I remember when the totem poles were made by Chief Kickpoo, where he used a few chainsaws and chisels, I was 9 years old then!”
- Mayo Peña, Sr., Campus Family Member

Please continue to stay in touch with our Cook Family at 480-968-9354 or della.pena@cooknam.org. Let us know how you are doing so we may share your news and reflections in our CNAMF newsletters and social media outlets. We hope to hear from you. God’s Peace be with you.