

Mission and Vision

In 2006, The Synod of the Southwest established a Native American Ministries Coordinating Committee (NAMCC) to:

- a. Explore future needs for Native American ministry across the Synod;
- b. Identify strategic needs for leadership development within congregations and presbyteries;
- c. Provide an opportunity for Native American people to talk about their experiences within their congregations, their presbyteries and the Synod;
- d. Explore the future of Native American churches as funding for presbyteries and synods is increasingly reduced by General Assembly;
- e. Think together about Synod-wide communication and staffing needs; and,
- f. Work with the Synod's Hispanic Ministries Coordinating committee to carry out and coordinate efforts with Synod leadership on Racial Ethnic issues beyond Native American and Hispanic constituencies.

Background and Unmet Needs

The Synod of the Southwest is home to 20 Native American churches and 9 Native American chapels. All but three of which are located within the bounds of the Presbyteries of de Cristo and Grand Canyon – Arizona (19 churches and 7 chapels) and three of which are located within the bounds of the Presbytery of Santa Fe – New Mexico (1 church and 2 chapels). Of those, 8 churches and 2 chapels are located within the bounds of the Navajo Nation.

As you may be aware, the hardest hit region affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic within Arizona and New Mexico are those counties that are within or contiguous to the Navajo Nation. In fact, the Navajo Nation, per capita, is the hardest hit area within the United States affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The Navajo Nation, the largest U.S. Indian Nation with a population of 356,890, approximately 175,000 of whom reside within the bounds of the Navajo Nation, is facing the possible devastation of its people due to COVID-19, as it fights the highest infection rate per capita in the United States, at an infection rate of 23 persons for every 1,000 people living in the Navajo Nation. (Source: cnn.com, Hollie Silverman, et. al., accessed May 19, 2020).

Making matters worse, about 30% of the population in the Navajo Nation does not have running water in their homes at a time when hand-washing is critical to combat the virus. There is also a limited medical infrastructure, Internet access, information, and adequate housing and easy access to grocery stores.

According to the [Washington Post](#), the Navajo Nation is living with one of the highest infection rates in the world, thanks in part to the delay in federal aid funding, which the Navajo Leadership believes has cost lives, in the latest example of hundreds of years of injustice perpetrated on the Navajo people.

Recently, at the request of Navajo Nation Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) leaders, the Presbytery of Grand Canyon marshalled dominant culture Presbyterian churches and members in an effort that provided 500 food boxes, each providing 1 month of food and supplies. These boxes were delivered to four locations within the Navajo Nation to strategic locations for distribution by Presbyterian Church Navajo Nation leaders. One hundred of the boxes were to be distributed to Presbyterian Native American families, 100 to members of communities immediately located within the sphere of those Native American churches and 300 to be distributed to persons outside those communities through the Navajo Nation government's COVID-19 Emergency Relief Program, to persons in need of food and supplies.

The issue that was being addressed by this distribution of food and supplies is the fact that within the Navajo Nation most communities are not served by big box grocery and supply chains, requiring Navajo Nation citizens to often travel hours to such a location, only to discover that the basics of food and supplies are not available. Such travel often entails traveling outside of the Navajo Nation. For perspective, imagine having only 7 grocery stores in the entire state of Connecticut.

What is clear as we assessed this and other situations in attempts to address the shortages of food and supplies, as well as protective equipment such as masks, is the fact that the leadership of the Presbyterian churches and chapels have become central locations from which food distribution and supplies can be distributed.

On the other hand, it is these very church centers that have been impacted by the "stay in place" orders of local, state and sovereign nations that has closed churches and chapels and resulted in already minimal financial support of those centers of community life whose members already live at or below federal poverty levels.

To further exacerbate the situation, only two of these 29 churches and chapels are served by installed pastors (who also serve as the liaisons between their communities, other Presbyterian churches and chapels and the presbyteries in Arizona in which they are located), and seven are served by part-time Commissioned Pastors.

The already pre-existing workload on these individuals has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic and their ability to serve their particular church and surrounding communities.

Likewise, the even further reduced income resulting from the church and chapel closures has made supporting the costs of keeping these centers of community life viable (electricity, water and gas – usually in the form of butane) nearly impossible.

We anticipate that even when social restrictions are lifted within these communities, that financial support will continue to be heavily impacted, at least for the foreseeable future.

Finally, in a community of people who are often without the means to access information regarding the issues presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic, these pastors, commissioned pastors and the lay leadership of these churches and chapels are often the only and best way to get that information and these very people in turn most often rely upon telephone service to get the information though that may not be the only method they use to disseminate information. In many communities within the Navajo Nation, for example, access to internet is at best limited and in reality not available and even telephone service may not be readily available and, if so, not affordable. To put this reality into perspective, the distribution of food and supplies to the families described above was primarily organized via text messages, as phone service was deemed too undependable by presbytery leaders.

Although it would certainly be a goal of funding to address the lack of internet and cellular telephone service within Native American Nations, particularly the Navajo Nation, the reality is that this is an issue with which these nations have grappled for some time and the cost of which would be in the millions of dollars given the remote and vast expanse of some of these communities.

Needs to be Met by this Grant – Goals and Purpose

A grant from the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s Presbyterian Mission Agency will:

1. Provide needed support for those pastors and commissioned pastors to be paid, as they serve their communities;
2. Provide needed support for the basic infrastructure of the churches and chapels as centers of community life (utility costs); and,
3. Provide funding for the purchase of food and supplies for distribution to Native American communities throughout the Synod of the Southwest.

How the Grant will be Used (for a six-month period from July 1 to December 31):

1. to underwrite the expenses related to providing financial compensation to the pastors and commissioned pastors within the Native American communities; and,
2. to underwrite the expenses related to keeping the telephone service active, the lights on, the water running and the gas in supply. With respect to the gas issue, in many communities butane is used to keep refrigerators and stoves working.
3. To underwrite the purchase of food and supplies for distribution to Native American communities.

Oversight of Expenditures

The oversight of funding will be through the NAMCC. The allocation and distribution of funding to particular ministries within the Native American Presbyterian community will be made in consultation with the staff leadership of the Presbyteries involved.

	Budget	
<u>Revenue:</u>		
PMA Grant	250,000	
Synod of the Southwest Support	25,000	
Other Donations	97,000	

Total Revenue		\$372,000
 <u>Expense:</u>		
Utilities	87,000 ¹	
Pastor/Commissioned Pastor Support	45,000 ²	
Food/Supplies	\$240,000 ³	

Total Expense		\$372,000

Notes:

1. On average, \$500/month for 6 months for 29 churches and chapels
2. On average, \$833/month per installed pastor/commissioned pastor (2 installed pastors and 7 part-time commissioned pastors).
3. On average, \$40,000/month for food and supplies to be distributed each month, relying on urban church congregations for the logistical support in preparing the boxes for distribution.