



**We are
Called**

TO HEAL. TO UNITE. TO JUSTICE.

Team Reflection - Huddle

No. 15 – Trauma and Hope: Behavioral Health Among American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/AN)

American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities experienced some of the harshest outcomes of the coronavirus, with mortality the highest of any race/ethnicity. In March 2021, vaccinations in Native communities was ahead of the general population. Jonathan Nez, Navajo Nation President, explained, there is “a strong sense of responsibility to protect the Native community and preserve cultural ways, [and vaccinations are] enough to give our people real hope.” [15.2]

Hope is vital for a population that has experienced intergenerational historical trauma and who today has disproportionately higher rates of mental health problems than the general U.S. population. Among AI/AN populations, behavioral health research finds a high prevalence of risk factors and high rates of suicide, PTSD and substance use disorders. More than a quarter of the population experiences poverty, more than 10% above the national average. They lack available services, culturally trained providers and shoulder much stigma when accessing mental health services. [15.3]

One person who saw great hope among Native peoples was Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia, a Catholic Bishop in the Mexican state of Chiapas. His years of living with the Mayan people touched him so deeply he often said, “the indigenous converted me!” Don Samuel, as he was affectionately known, saw the presence of God in the cultures and the people he served. His unending commitments to inclusion gave the people great hope. His joy stemmed from the beauty he noticed in the Native cultures that gave respect and recognition for difference. This enabled seeing diversity as integral to the richness and growth in the human family. [15.4]

Consider

How do I see and look for the dignity in Native peoples? What histories have been passed on to me about Native peoples or anyone from a different ethnicity?

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Let us pray together,

“We need to realize that we have a role to play in overcoming our own discrimination which is sometimes very subtly held, but that we do need to overcome and see our indigenous peoples as brothers and sisters, not because we are legally mandated to do so, but because we genuinely see them as our brothers and sisters in the struggle for a better world.”

- Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia

[15.1] <https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/2020/06/19/native-american-mental-health-coronavirus/>

[15.2] <https://theweek.com/articles/970243/covids-assault-native-americans>

[15.3] <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/education/mental-health-facts>, see also: <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=39>

[15.4] https://www.ncronline.org/news/finding-seeds-word-bishop-ruiz?_ga=2.228211353.523143246.1616530169-1671986588.1616003053