

Anglican Diocese of the Amazon

Bishop Marinez

The Anglican Diocese of the Amazon has sought to live the marks of mission as a whole and has a big focus on the fifth mark of the mission that calls us to safeguard God's creation and to fight to save human life.

The example set by the Anglican Communion's engagement in environmental justice movements, such as the Renew our World campaign and Season of Creation, and also the desire to live the Marks of Mission more deeply and to be God's Church for God's World in the Amazon, led us to understand that we are called to pray and act for behaviour change, awareness and social and environmental justice, and we are also challenged to raise awareness of climate change, prophetically denouncing everything that destroys life on our planet.

Living with the peoples of the Amazon region has awakened us to our relationship with the earth, with the creation of God. We human beings have the essential responsibility to take care of creation, and this is also a commitment to the Gospel of Christ.

To be God's Church for the God's world in this region, one must be committed to the "Culture of Life", to the rescue of dignity, justice, peace and socio-environmental preservation – fruits of the experience of love according to Christ's commandment!

For us, taking care of the socio-environmental issues of the Amazon region is to be Church; to take care of the environment is to be Church; to take care of the people who live in this environment is how we live our faith.

We learn from the indigenous peoples in the Amazon that the land is sacred, that territories are sacred and are like extensions of their bodies. They are part of their sacredness, in the relationship with the peoples of the forest (peoples originating in the Amazon) we take contact with an ecological theology and come to understand that we are part of the whole, part of the web that is the creation of God and we come to understand that when creation is violated, degraded, our bodies are also violated, degraded and we understand raising our voice against climate injustices, against socio-environmental injustices, is not a purely ideological action, but an Evangelical action, that is, it is part of our discipleship and the experience of faith.

Our projects developed in the area of environmental justice strongly impact our way of being a Church, impact our way of worship and our spirituality. Also, the elements of local culture impact our way of worship, the songs, the instruments the objects are part of our sacredness.

Background

The Brazilian Amazon Region is one of the world's largest rainforests and biomes, with unique biodiversity. It is inhabited by people of rich culture and customs. Paradoxically, it is also a region of enormous inequalities and government has always failed to fulfil its obligations.

Brazil as a whole, and the Amazon in particular, is greatly impacted by a process of necro-politics (death politics) aimed at crushing the structures of protection and environmental care, and the rights of the most vulnerable populations.

The current government had already started dismantling environmental protection but has used the pandemic as an opportunity to accelerate the process. Environmental protection bodies have been scrapped, surveillance weakened, and environmental protection standards and laws systematically deregulated and weakened. In consequence, mining has encroached on previously preserved indigenous lands. Rivers have become polluted with heavy ores, killing fish and damaging the health of riverside populations, indigenous people and quilombolas (former slaves' safe communities). Illegal extraction of native timber has increased, and deforestation has increased more than 200%, reaching the record mark of 1,046 square kilometers in 2021. Thousands of outbreaks of fires have been recorded.

This all strongly impacts the entire Amazon region, causing drastic changes, resulting in the degradation of environmental havens, increased floods in the southeast, north and northeast of Brazil, and extreme drought in the southern region, even causing a water crisis in the country.

This absolute failure of commitment to the preservation, care and defence of life is have devastating impacts on nature and has led to the death and persecution of indigenous leaders, other indigenous peoples (riverside communities and quilombolas) and environmentalists.

One of the strategies designed by the Anglican Diocese of the Amazon was the creation of spaces for pedagogical dialogue and socio-political formation that contribute to boosting society in the renewal of its beliefs and values.

Planting Lives Project

The Planting Lives project is an ecumenical initiative with two pillars:

- Revitalising nurseries for the cultivation and distribution of native tree seedlings for reforestation.
- Developing community gardens and medicinal plant nurseries.

The project is still in the early stages, having emerged from a dialogue between the Anglican Diocese of the Amazon, Koinonia (an FBO) and the Movement of People Affected by Dams

(MAB), as a strategy to resist and to cope with the civilization crisis that Brazil is going through – the pandemic, the economic crisis, the lack of guarantee of basic social rights, the environmental crisis, predatory extractive activities and human rights violations.

Goals

The project aims to challenge and change attitudes and behaviours as well as having more concrete / physical outcomes. The desired outcomes include:

- the creation of spaces for dialogue and discussion on socio-environmental justice;
- exposing the negative impacts that relaxing the environmental protection laws is having on Amazonian biodiversity and traditional populations (indigenous, quilombolas and riverside dwellers);
- making visible the impacts of climate change on the lives of the most vulnerable populations, especially women, youth and children;
- raising awareness of the importance of caring for and preserving native tree species – as an inheritance and also as something to pass on to future generations, and about the need for a change of attitude and adoption of sustainable habits;
- the production, cultivation and distribution of tree seedlings for reforestation, both as a practical action and act of raising public awareness and advocacy;
- rescuing the use of medicinal herbs and raising awareness of the importance of traditional indigenous medicine;
- cultivating community organic gardens as a source of food and for the social economy of indigenous populations and indigenous Venezuelan immigrants.

The project as a direct target audience of approximately 121 Venezuelan Waraos indigenous families in Belém and 100 indigenous families in Manaus and its metropolitan region.

Activities and Results:

To date the positive results have included: the revitalization of a seedling nursery at the Republic of Emaús Movement site; the production and transplantation of seedlings to be distributed; planting seedlings at the Youth Meeting of the Provincial Area III of the IEAB; the construction of two medicinal herb nurseries and an organic vegetable garden. In addition, round table conversations have been held on the importance of preserving native species, on socio-environmental justice, and on the solidarity economy.

Setting up a wheel of conversation on socio-environmental justice, and formative cycles on “associativism” and social economy. Associativism is a Brazilian concept that means collective cooperation, or partnership-making and a symbol of freedom to associate

Challenges:

Challenges faced have included the limitations imposed by the Covid 19 pandemic, the daily threats to life and the environment in the Amazon (such as burning, deforestation, and violence against environmentalists, human rights activists, leaders of indigenous communities and agents of social movements), small financial resources to carry out the

work, the difficult of moving around in the Amazon region, and the vulnerability of the target audience.

Learning:

Through this project we are learning that our role as the Church of Christ established in this diverse region is to join forces in discussions about the need to take care of our biodiversity, to focus on the reality in our lives, to build a new era with greater awareness that we need to preserve nature and preserve the lives of the original communities (indigenous, riverside dwellers, quilombolas) who live in our region and that are very important for the preservation of our Common Home. We want to have further discussions about climate change and its impacts on our biodiversity and the lives of communities in our region. We also want to raise our voices and denounce the processes of deregulation of social and environmental policies, the scrapping of environmental protection bodies and violations of the rights of indigenous populations.

Economic Justice and Indigenous Identity Project

This project aims to empower indigenous women living in urban contexts.

Many indigenous people have been forced into urban life on the outskirts of large cities such as Manaus and Belém, expelled from their territories by the arrival of colonizers. Many have unlearned their mother tongue and have been forced to abandon their culture. Structural racism makes people ashamed of their origins, causing countless indigenous people to deny their identity. This dramatically impacts people's lives and is a form of violence against them.

At the same time, there is the stereotypical idea that "pure" indigenous people are only those who live in a village or isolated community. There is urgent need to talk about indigenous identity and to rescue and respect the diversity of indigenous culture.

Objectives and Activities:

This project aims to empower indigenous women by generating a "solidarity economy", by strengthening their sense of identification with their indigenous culture and by equipping the women to read reality critically. The project has a direct target audience of 60 indigenous women artisans.

Activities include making indigenous handicrafts for income generation and building "associativism networks" for joint marketing. These economic activities also provide space for conversation and formation about context analysis and critical understanding of indigenous reality in the urban context.

Outcomes:

This project has been underway since 2018 and has resulted in indigenous artisan women being reunited with aspects of their culture that had been neglected because of living in an urban context. These include the rescue of their mother tongue; the awareness that the making of ancestral craftsmanship is an instrument of resilience and income generation; and the expansion of associativism networks and the social economy.

Challenges:

Challenges include the limiting effect of the Covid 19 pandemic which prevented face-to-face activities between 2020 and 2022, few financial resources, the high costs and difficulty of mobility in the Amazon, the violations of the rights of indigenous peoples in the region, the weakening of public policies to protect indigenous peoples, and the vulnerability of indigenous women living in urban areas.

Course of Popular Educators in the Amazon

Objective: To strengthen the struggle for economic, social, cultural, human and environmental rights, through the formation of social educators, from a conception of popular and sociopolitical education (Paulo Freire), based on a liberating theological vision, committed to social, economic and environmental justice and on the construction of an egalitarian, solidary and just society.

Activities of the Social Educators Course in the Amazon:

This is an annual course held between March and November with five hours of activities every Saturday. Its purpose is to train participants in community development projects and advocacy. It covers areas of defence of human and environmental rights, the defence of the Amazon, and the building up of a democratic and solidarity society.

Outcomes:

Now in its 7th edition, this is a course with strong social impact that equips 35 educators every year. Social leaders have been empowered, the number of agents of change in the metropolitan region of Belém has increased and development projects for the benefit of people who are on the margins of the political and economic system has multiplied.

Learning: over the 7 years of existence of the Popular Educators Course we have seen that the formation and equipping of popular leaders leads them to spread and strengthen a dynamic process that impacts the lives of the communities in which they live, promoting a broad process of advocacy and transformation. We have also learned that in times of crisis, loss and violation of rights (such as we are currently experiencing in Brazil) the course becomes even more fundamental in the creation of strategies to face inequalities and strengthen a movement of resistance and resilience. We have learned that the social educator must be, first of all, a person committed to the defence of human dignity and the environment so this changes mindset of young people, family members and their local community.

Challenges:

The limitation of vacancies (we have the capacity to welcome 35 students to each edition of the Course), a context of violence to which the population of the peripheries in the Amazon region is subject, the limitations imposed by the Covid 19 pandemic that directly impacted the format of the course in the years 2020 and 2021 causing the modules to be online, digital inequality/digital exclusion prevented many students from accessing the pandemic, mobility difficulties in the Amazon.

Partners:

The partners in these 3 projects are:

- UNIPOP (Popular University - NGO)
- MAB (Dam Affected Movement)
- CAC (Culture Support Center)
- Koinonia (FBO)
- Amazonize (become the Amazon yourself) Network
- Episcopal Diocese of California
- PWRDF
- Anglican Communion Fund
- SADD (Anglican Diaconia and Development Service)
- AMARN (Association of Women of the Upper Negro River)