

International Anglican Family Network
Anglican Communion Youth Network
International Anglican Women's Network
A joint newsletter September 2021



Young People and the COVID-19 Pandemic



**Stories of challenge, creativity, resilience and
hope from around the Anglican Communion**



Young People and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Editorial:

By 16-year-old Nakiata, a member of St Luke's Church, Cross Roads, Jamaica



COVID-19, a force to be reckoned with, has changed life and normality as we know it. It has impacted many in the most tragic ways, with lives lost, a feeling of powerlessness and the constant state of hyper vigilance. Grief and anxiety have become a part of our everyday life. As we look at the news, hear it on the radio and experience it for ourselves, we come to the overwhelming realisation that the world is in utter chaos. For the youth, COVID has affected us mostly in the aspects of socialisation and education. We do have our families and friends to relate to and share comfort with but sometimes even that may not be able to reel our minds back from the possibility of never being able to live as we used to.

I must say, one of the hardest things that I have done in all my sixteen years of life is online school. If I was to use an analogy to describe how terrifying it is, I would say that it is as if a boulder was rolling at a fast pace down a hill and I was stuck at the bottom of the hill with no means of escape whatsoever, and that is an understatement. Having assignments, tests, exams and school-based assessments to complete, and not being able to do them to the best of your abilities, is heart-wrenching to say the least. If someone were to ask me what I have learned over the past year I would instantaneously break down crying, because that question would be a reminder that I am missing out on gaining knowledge every day.

Sometimes I feel as if adults are under the impression that it is not as hard as it seems because, even if we explain to them with the most frustrated and scared voice we can muster, nothing is being done. There is no form of leniency and the expectations are still as high as the moon. No changes are being made to help us and we are left to figure it out on our own with a few encouraging words of, 'I know it is hard but you will be okay'. Moreover, those same adults may be the ones who find it hard not to go to a party or gathering every other day but yet still refuse to take the vaccine with no thought of the fact that when they participate in these risk-taking activities, it prevents us from being able to go back to school or return to a level of usual security.

Still, having the support of the Anglican Church community and my church in particular, St Luke's Anglican Church, Cross Roads, and the Anglican Youth Fellowship, has helped me somewhat with coping through this gloomy period. They have encouraged me to take this difficult journey step by step and at a pace that I am comfortable with. This is advice that I often relay to my peers when they are on the verge of a mental breakdown, as many young people have been over this past year and a half.

Many of us have lost our way and our faith through this time but the church has been there. The church family, congregation and community have found ways to reach out to us and to be of much needed emotional support, ensuring that communication, joy and love are not missing from our lives.

The stories in this newsletter, a joint publication of the International Anglican Family Network, the Anglican Communion Youth Network and the International Anglican Women's Network, paint a picture of disruption and challenges to young lives all over the world. But they also flag up the resilience and faithful creativity of youth, especially when supported by church communities and initiatives. Yes, COVID-19 has been hard for everyone. It is stubborn and leaves a sinister taste in our mouths. Even so, we are strong and with the hands of God lifting us up we are even stronger. We must try to ensure that our mental and physical health is our main priority. With the aid of our families, friends, the Anglican Youth Fellowship, the church and our prayers for one another, we continue to take it day by day, at our own pace, and with optimism.

International Anglican Family Network (IAFN)

IAFN celebrates the God-given potential of the family as a source of thriving relationships, identity, belonging, discipleship and reconciliation.

Contact email: iafn@anglicancommunion.org
<https://iafn.anglicancommunion.org>
<https://www.facebook.com/AnglicanFamilies>

Anglican Communion Youth Network (ACYN)

A global network gathering, supporting and promoting the ministries of young people and youth workers in the Anglican Communion.

Contact email: iayn@anglicancommunion.org
<https://www.facebook.com/anglicanyouthnetwork>
<https://twitter.com/IAYN17>

International Anglican Women's Network (IAWN)

A bold and prophetic voice for all women throughout the Anglican Communion, working to uphold the God-given dignity of women and girls.

Contact email: iawn@anglicancommunion.org
<https://iawn.anglicancommunion.org>
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/IntAngWomen>

Front cover photo: *Scottish Episcopal Church—Young person leading sung prayers at the in-person final worship of this year's 'blended' Provincial Youth Week. Story page 3.*

Contents

New circumstances, new ministry.....	3
Lockdown support for Scottish youth.....	3
A teenage carer's story	4
More faith, less fear	5
A pilgrimage for climate justice goes ahead	6
A time to hope	7
All spheres of life affected	8
COVID-19: The positive side	9
School closures: girls more at risk	10
Te Pihopatanga o Aotearoa online	10
'I turn my gaze to God': Young voices from Mexico	11
Please take the IAFN survey	12
Prayer.....	12

New circumstances, new ministry

By Zablon Orechi Agumbi. Zablon is 29 years old and lives in Nairobi, Kenya, where he is a member of the Parochial Parish Council at St Luke's Parish in All Saints Cathedral Diocese. He is passionate about Youth Ministry and, as well as serving in his parish and diocese, he has represented the Anglican Church of Kenya in youth fora.

The year began well in 2020 and many people looked forward to another wonderful and fulfilling time ahead. Plans had been made, resolutions written down and implementation started, and everything seemed blissful. Children and young people were going back to school to begin another academic year, from the gates of kindergarten to the hallways of university. Everyone was excited. It was a difficult time for others who may not be privileged enough to have access to education and many other amenities. But generally, people started off on a high note.

As days and weeks passed, we began hearing news of a virus that was affecting people in China. This virus built up momentum and within weeks we began to see a trend in other parts of the world. Concern was raised and an alarm was sounded by various health bodies, governments and the United Nations among others. In the beginning, we didn't hear so much about the spread of the virus in Africa. But within days the virus spread so fast that by early March 2020, African countries started to record cases. At this point in time, people were still trying to come to terms with what was happening. Some were skeptical, while some, after seeing what was happening across the world, chose to believe the virus existed.

In Kenya, day by day, we heard of infections rising in the country with people going on with self-assurance that no one in their circle had been infected. Already a name had been given to it - the Coronavirus. By June 2020, the rise in infections in Kenya was quite alarming, necessitating a lockdown in various parts of the country that were considered hotspots. Nairobi was the hotbed of the virus, being the capital, and so this meant that many people would be affected. Gatherings were completely banned, including meeting in churches. People began working from home, while others experienced lay-offs, and schools were also closed indefinitely.

In my parish of St Luke's Church-Mbagathi we experienced the inevitable. Since we are located in an area within the city that has both the middle class and underprivileged families, we saw and knew young people who were in need of food since their parents were not working anymore. We also experienced young people having uncertainties about the future, while others chose to relocate to the rural areas with their families since they couldn't support themselves anymore for lack of income. Our fellowship also grew cold since meetings were banned and we hadn't prepared for this. In fact, this is something that each one of us battled with.

The church, through the Parochial Church Council and under the Vicar's leadership, came up with various initiatives. Among them was a food bank where congregants were informed through the church's WhatsApp group of the need to help

each other by donating food items. This was spearheaded by the People's Warden together with a team in the outreach department. Every week food was donated and distributed. This was very impactful to those who had lost streams of income. The church also began putting mechanisms for going online with the Sunday and midweek services. Lucky enough, we already had a camera in place. An editor was brought on board to aid with graphics. We are still streaming our services to date and people tune in to be fed.



Despite experiencing some deaths through COVID-19 within the parish, especially in the adult congregation, our Curate who is also the Youth Pastor has ensured that he constantly encourages people through Bible verses and prayers, using the Youth's WhatsApp platform. As part of our Youth Ministry we also took Book Study online every Saturday, and we have seen people being encouraged and also challenged to grow in Christ as we sharpen each other. We know that the pandemic is far from over and so, through godly wisdom, we continue coming up with ways of reaching out to God's people and helping one another in these difficult times.

CONTACT: zablonagumbi@gmail.com

Lockdown support for Scottish youth

By Claire Benton-Evans. Claire works with young people and youth leaders in Scotland. She is the Scottish Episcopal Church's Provincial Youth Committee Enabler and the Youth and Children Officer for Edinburgh Diocese. (Young people's names have been changed).

Teenagers in the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) were dealt a double blow by the COVID-19 pandemic: in March 2020, Scotland entered lockdown, which was to last – on and off – for over a year. Shortly afterwards, youth leaders took the difficult decision to cancel the hugely popular Provincial Youth Week, which has been bringing teenagers in the SEC together for 26 years for a week of fun, faith and friendship.

Suddenly young people were stuck at home with their families, unable to see their friends or go to school. Their education went online and they told us it felt as if they were either passively receiving information on Zoom (rather than

interacting) or completing worksheets on their own. Those with mental health problems faced long waits for treatment and support. Anxiety and depression got worse when stress relievers such as a night out with friends became impossible. These were dark days, and we knew that we wanted to keep our young people connected and give them something to look forward to – some light in the darkness.

So we planned our first ever Online Provincial Youth Week, having surveyed our young people to find out what they loved most about it. Much could be delivered online: young people met in house groups on Zoom and explored the Bible, life and faith together, facilitated by trained youth leaders. We gave young people space to chat and take part in activities, both online and offline. We shared a Night Eucharist by candlelight, just as we do when we meet in person.

After the summer, as Scotland re-entered stricter lockdown measures, we surveyed our young people again to ask them how they would like to stay connected. They asked for opportunities to talk, play and pray together, so we created a weekly programme on Zoom that alternated interactive games, chat sessions and Night Prayer. As we entered the long, dark Scottish winter, we held a 'Winter Wonderland Sleepover' on Zoom, which made the most of the cosiness of winter nights and the opportunities created by meeting online: young people made dens in their living rooms and snuggled up to watch a movie together; we even had a Blessing of the Pets, which would have been much more challenging in person!

All these events were made possible by the time and dedication of youth leaders in the SEC. Nearly all volunteers, they turned up online, week after week, to host chat, lead prayers or play games. They created a safe space for young people to come and be heard, and it became clear how much this was valued. Young people joined Zoom chats to tell us that they had done well in their exams or got the apprenticeship they had applied for. We met their pets and listened to them when they needed to tell someone just how hard lockdown was. Nikki told us why she liked coming to the online chats: 'I don't really get to talk to my friends these days. I don't get to hang out with people of my own age very much.' Callum said: 'It's a welcome distraction. It's good to get



The Scottish summer weather didn't dampen the fun of this online/offline Scavenger Hunt

lost in conversation.' A parent got in touch to say thank you: 'This lockdown and school closure seems so much harder on our teenagers than the last one and chances like this to meet are so much appreciated.'

This summer, coming out of lockdown, we held our second Provincial Youth Week in a pandemic, which built on everything we had learned last year, and offered even more online and interactive content. It also included two precious opportunities to meet in person. More young people booked for this 'blended' Youth Week (see <https://bit.ly/3yD7jSF>) than for any youth week in the past six years; this surely shows the power of simply showing up for young people, week after week in the darkest of times, to let them know that they have not been forgotten.

CONTACT: Claire Benton-Evans

ClaireBE@scotland.anglican.org. See SEC's latest Provincial Youth newsletter here: <https://bit.ly/3jD89ur>

A teenage carer's story

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed life for all of us, but its effects have hit young people particularly hard – especially young people who are responsible for caring for a family member. Fifteen-year-old Phoebe in the UK tells us what life has been like for her:

'I've been caring for my mum for many years. I started caring for her when I was about two or three years old, as she struggles quite badly with epilepsy and mental health. About six or seven years ago we had a car accident as well, so her head's been all over the place.

'I have always found with my caring role that sometimes I am having to give up a lot of time to help my mum. With looking after her there are certain things I have to do to help – like sometimes, if she's feeling really bad, I will help her on the toilet and help her in the bath.

'If mum's unwell, I will usually put her first and leave my schoolwork and coursework and see to it later. Before the pandemic, there would be days where I would take days off school to help her and sometimes change plans with friends. It's never nice to see the person you love in pain, but you help them knowing that what you're doing is having a good impact on them and their health.

'When COVID first happened, mum's anxiety got quite bad – to the point where she wouldn't stand outside, she was that scared. I would go and do the food shops and everything for her. I would get quite a lot of stares in the shops and have quite a lot of people judge me, saying that I shouldn't be out and that my parents should be out doing the food shop. I would usually go early in the morning, so there would be hardly anyone in the shops. But I think the one thing I found stressful was the fact that I had so many people judging me.

'My mental health was also affected by lockdown, because of the isolation and I think just the fact that I didn't have my set routine, and I wasn't able to go out and see friends and go to school. I was just at home all the time, and I didn't have that break. I was also looking after Mum more, because she was

quite ill during lockdown, I think in one day she'd had about six or seven seizures. I just had to be there and help her, as we don't have any professionals coming in to help her. If Mum's quite badly ill with her epilepsy, we usually ring up an ambulance.

'I've had so much support from everyone, but I think it's made it harder not being able to see them in person with COVID and everything. But it still helps talking online and having Zoom calls.'



Photo courtesy of The Children's Society

Since the start of the pandemic, national charity The Church of England Children's Society has been working with churches, schools communities and local services for young carers, like *Caring Together* (<https://bit.ly/3DLdJTB>), to provide emergency support to young carers like Phoebe. They also support the tens of thousands of other young people in this country who are affected by poverty, abuse and poor mental health. Normally The Children's Society runs services that support young people face to face, but when the pandemic hit they switched to providing support through phone and video calls. Knowing that they have someone to reach out to when they need support has been a vital lifeline for so many children and young people, helping to keep their hope and faith alive at a time when it's been sorely tested. Thanks to the work of The Children's Society and its supporters, thousands of vulnerable young people have found they are still able to look forward to a brighter future. As Phoebe herself says:

'There's always light at the end of the tunnel, and everything happens for a reason. It may not be a good reason but at the same time there's always something good comes out of it.'

CONTACT: supportercare@childrenssociety.org.uk or visit <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk> to find out more.

More faith, less fear

Sergio Armando Mendoza Pérez and his family are Anglicans living in El Salvador. Like everyone at the beginning, the pandemic affected them directly in their daily lives. Sergio describes his experience:

The community church was closed, transportation was suspended, markets were closed, classes were suspended. My parents were forced to leave their jobs due to the strict quarantine that the government implemented. On one



Exposure: Focusing the lens on gender-based violence

An Invitation to all young Anglicans

The Anglican Communion Office is inviting young Anglicans (aged 35 and under) to submit entries to a social media video campaign for this year's '16 Days Of Activism against Gender-Based Violence' (25 November to 10 December). A selection of videos submitted to the project will be chosen for publication on the Anglican Communion's social media channels during the 16 Days. Videos should be no more than two minutes long and don't have to be professional. They can be made from a mobile phone. However, please do make sure the sound of the video is clear. You can use your own language (please provide a transcript) to make the video. Deadline 31 October. See <https://bit.ly/3maRbVW> for more information.

occasion, some police officers threatened to take us to a secure centre just for the simple fact of finding us in the courtyard of our home. In those early days there was an excessive and inhuman reign of fear and terror because we were not being educated about how to react to a positive case of COVID-19. It was feared that having COVID was the worst thing that could happen to us. There were situations where the anguish led to a pushing away of our sisters and brothers in Christ. Even the government's Ministry of Health didn't have a clear way of reacting and making people aware.

As young people active in the church, we had to put together strategies to deal with the situation due to the fact that we were being denied access to the church building. So that we did not become overwhelmed by this ordeal, we formed prayer cells at a certain time of the day. We started a project called 'More faith and less fear' with the aim of strengthening prayer through the faith and hope that we have in God.

My family and I put to good use the gift that God has given us, which is to be part of the church choir. We created a variety of music videos using song lyrics that were very relevant to the reality we are living. Our songs have hopeful messages, asking God to intercede in these distressing moments that we are living. This work was carried out virtually. We also hold vigils, masses, and evening prayers to give each other strength.

To cope with the economic crisis that we were going through, my family, and many other families, are taking the approach of *coyol quebrado, coyol comido* (meaning in English 'living hand to mouth'). We no longer had funds so we had to face this situation, as a family, and think of different and creative ways to generate income. My mother came up with making face masks and we subsisted on the small funds she received from them. After a short time a project of the youth network

called 'Acting for Climate Justice' came along, whereby we were given seeds and seedlings of different crops with the aim of creating family gardens to help us with our nutrition. The church also played an important role with the delivery of various food packages. God moved the hearts of various institutions to support us in this social, economic, psychological and sometimes even spiritual crisis. Protection measures (masks, gloves, alcohol gel, taking a temperature, social distancing, etc) were, and are, of great help.



With the opening of the economy and knowing that the virus is not a myth but a reality, and with the maturity of each one of us, schools have re-opened and churches are offering their services, all with a strict safety protocol. I am already waiting for the time of my first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine to arrive. With this I bear witness that God never forsakes us and this episode in life has taught us to value things that in the past we had not appreciated. It helped us to communicate more as a family and, in our community, it helped us to strengthen charitable communication links because there were families that were going through a worse situation than us. As a church, when the four walls of the church building were closed, we understood that the church is us and, as it says in its gospel, where two or three gather in his name, he will be in its midst.

CONTACT: c/o iafn@anglicancommunion.org

A pilgrimage for climate justice goes ahead!

The sudden necessity to follow COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions in the UK didn't stop 18-year-old Bethany Cook from taking part in planning and organising a nationwide pilgrimage to draw attention to climate change. She writes:

This November, world leaders will meet in Glasgow, Scotland, for the 26th Conference of the Parties that signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26).

Hosting these climate negotiations on our island provides churches in the UK with a critical opportunity to stand up for our brothers and sisters in churches around the world who are losing their livelihoods and homes due to climate change. Rising sea levels, unpredictable weather patterns, desertification and famine are all a direct result of our abuse and exploitation of God's creation. We believe that God calls us to care for his planet and to care for our brothers and sisters around the world who are suffering from the effects of the greenhouse gases we have been emitting for decades.

That's why, in spite of being in COVID-19 pandemic lock-down, the Young Christian Climate Network began organising a 'Relay to COP26', even though we had no idea what restrictions would be in place in the months ahead. One benefit of lockdown has been that we are all far more fluent with video technology, so online meetings with those hoping to join the Relay or hold events along the way were made a lot easier via the gift of Zoom!

Fortunately, by June, groups of 30 were allowed to gather outside and our five-month pilgrimage could begin. People of all ages have been walking in sections from the G7 meeting* in Cornwall at the southern tip of England, carrying our 'Relay to COP26' flag all the way to Glasgow, to arrive in November ahead of COP26. We have been careful to walk in two separate groups when numbers exceed 30, and we have had to limit the number of people who could stay overnight in a single venue en route.

My role has been to organise the section from Reading to London and, after three months of organising volunteers, sorting routes, timings, overnight accommodation and many more logistics, I decided to experience the walk for myself!

My section began in Reading on 31 July and six days later I was walking my 98th kilometre along Millennium Bridge to St Paul's Cathedral in London. Walking together outside proved a safe way to build relationships and spark conversations after so long spent socially distanced, isolated and locked down. Meeting so many energising and inspiring people with so much passion for God's creation was an incredible experience. The conversations we had along the way with other walkers and passers-by were so moving and encouraging and have filled me with renewed hope for change.

I have been overwhelmed by the welcomes we received from churches along the way as they cheered the walkers on and invited us in for refreshments and meals.

People of all ages and Christians of all church traditions were involved, from pre-school children joining a couple of miles, to experienced pilgrims trekking multiple days, passing on our 'Relay to COP26' flag, which travelled the whole route. We are also transporting a handcrafted boat to pop up at events in cities along the way as a symbol of our hope that we would set sail towards a more just future, and as a reminder that we are all in the same storm but not in the same boat.

Our hope is that the UK government will seize the opportunity that we have in hosting COP26 to secure far more ambitious targets to limit global warming and to significantly increase finance for countries and communities being pushed further

into debt and poverty by climate change. We are calling on our leaders to protect people, not bank balances. In many cases, the poorest nations have contributed the least to climate change and need access to finance in order to adapt to and mitigate the effects of increasing food insecurity, changing disease burdens, extreme weather events and loss of homes. One of the four messages we are asking of the UK government is to reinstate the foreign aid budget to 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income after they cut it to 0.5 per cent during the pandemic. As host for both the G7 and COP26, our government needs to be leading the way in global cooperation rather than acting out of self interest and cutting us off from a problem that is affecting the whole planet and is impacting the poor and vulnerable the most.

Another of our aims for the Relay is to remind individuals and churches of the personal responsibility we all have to be stewards of God's creation. We young Christians are convinced of the biblical mandate to care for the environment. Rather than treating it as a small, separate issue with which churches can engage or not, we believe that creation care is integral to our faith and calling to follow Jesus. Although it is easy to lament and grieve the future of our planet, we have faith in a God who provides, and in this Relay we are stepping out and walking on in joyful conviction that we have a voice and the power to bring about change.



'Nearly there! Young pilgrims nearing the end of their section of the climate relay at the Millennium Bridge, London

It can feel like our actions are only a drop in the ocean and although we recognise that COP26 is a critical opportunity for our government to bring about decade-defining changes, we believe in a God of hope, love and almighty power who is with us in every small act. There are steps that we can all take ahead of COP26 to tread more lightly on our precious planet.

Find out how you can get involved on our website <https://www.yccn.uk>, which also has dates and places for the Relay. If you are in the UK, we would love you to join us as we walk in, and celebrate, the glory of God's creation, rising to the moment and standing up for climate justice.

* G7 is an inter-governmental political forum consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK and USA

CONTACT: hello@yccn.uk

'Since the beginning of the pandemic, Covid-19 has generated terror, fear and despair in the youth of my region due to the permanence of the virus ... This virus has come to stay and it is what they have to live with. They make the virus part of their lives and they know that they have to take care of themselves and their loved ones.'

Fabian Camilo Sanchez Madariaga, Anglican seminarian at the University Santo Tomás in Colombia

A time to hope

By Ruan da Silveira Isnardi. Twenty-four-year-old Ruan is Episcopal Secretary of the Anglican Diocese of Pelotas, Brazil, and a member of the Coordination of Youth Ministry. He is a graduate in History from the Federal University of Pelotas, and a student of theology at the United College of Vitória.

Biblical training, study meetings, online meetings and support for homeless people were all activities promoted by the Anglican Youth Ministry of Pelotas. The COVID-19 pandemic made it necessary to reformulate the planning of activities for the year 2020. This was the case with the Anglican Diocese of Pelotas and the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil, and with various sectors of society. We had to reinvent ourselves. And this reinvention continued the work and shaped the actions of the Diocese and the *União da Juventude Anglicana do Brasil* (Union of Anglican Youth of Brazil).

So what did we do? We offered online Bible studies with the participation of young people from different dioceses. The studies were divided into two cycles; the first with eight meetings and the second with nine. We used material from the Anglican Alliance with the support of several people from all over the country in the role of facilitators.

During the course of the Bible study cycles, there was an online *Festa Junina* (June party) which gave an opportunity to socialise with music and typical food. Each person in their own home, of course!

Diocesan youth also participated in activities at the provincial level. This gave visibility to the Diocese of Pelota's youth. 'How to be closer to young people from other dioceses?'; this is a recurrent question of the Diocesan Youth Ministry.

In the month of July, when it is very cold in southern Brazil, the Anglican Youth Ministry in Pelotas held a live video stream to raise funds in aid of homeless people. The name of the live stream was the *Show Abraço Quentinho!* (Warm Hug Show). With the funds raised it was possible to buy 126 hats and 126

SHOW ABRAÇO QUENTINHO!

09/07 às 20h

PROMOVIDO PELA JUVENTUDE ANGLICANA DE PELOTAS PARA A COMPRA DE AGASALHOS.

TRANSMISSÃO PELO FACEBOOK DA DIOCESE ANGLICANA DE PELOTAS

DOE PELO PIX: DIOCESE@DAPSUL.COM.BR

DESCRIÇÃO: AGASALHO

YARANA BORGES

TIAGO LUDDU

VITÓRIA DA GRAÇA

LUAN HONÓRIO

KAYRAN BORGES

VITÓRIA FELDENS

RENAN MUNSBERG

DIÓRGENES DA ROSA

pairs of gloves, and to make 100 hot dogs. The suggestion of what to buy came from the homeless people themselves.

Also in July, the Diocesan youth promoted a Zoom meeting with Revda Tati Ribeiro. The proposal was to talk about intentional discipleship, a topic being discussed in all spheres of the Anglican Diocese of Pelotas. The title of the meeting was 'Discipleship and Youth: What does God expect from us?'

The pandemic was, and continues to be, a great challenge for the Anglican Diocese of Pelotas. But the church has not stopped; the resilience and actions of the youth can prove it. Of course, there are no good points in a pandemic, but the way in which this situation is faced can bring great lessons. There has been a lot of progress, particularly with regard to the work of groups.

Networking has been a hallmark of the episcopal ministry of our Diocesan Bishop, the Rt Revd Meriglei Simim, who is the youth chaplain for Pelotas. Thanks to this 'community' approach, youth have been included and given space at diocesan and provincial level. To continue this direction, the Diocese is carrying out a census to get to know its young people and to organise a retreat, when it is safe, to strengthen the ties that have emerged during the pandemic period.

Difficulties still persist. Up until 2020, the diocesan office was in the centre of the city of Pelotas but with the arrival of Bishop Meriglei, the office was transferred from the centre to a neighbourhood on the outskirts, where there is intense social work being undertaken by the church through the AMAR Association. This association, which belongs to the Anglican Diocese of Pelotas, serves about 90 families each month, developing music classes and courses for income generation. Unfortunately all of them stopped because of the pandemic.

This geographical move of the diocesan office has profoundly influenced the way the church sees its mission in this region, and the very active youth have not remained unresponsive. Training projects were designed for young people, with a view to having selection tests for college, as well as a woodworking course and an educational vegetable garden. Because of the pandemic these activities have not actually started to take place but they are being planned and are a sign of a change of outlook. Expansion of services is not easy, especially in outlying areas where the church does not have enough physical structure, but there is a lot of faith and willpower. With the grace of Jesus we will go forward.

CONTACT: ruanisnardi@gmail.com

All spheres of life affected

Four students at Bujumbura Christian University, Gaspard Nduwimana of Holy Trinity Cathedral, Suzanne Nshimirimana of Nyakabiga Parish, Elysé Ndikumwami of Cibitoke Parish and Benjamin Kwizera of Gatumba Parish, describe how all areas of young lives have been touched by the pandemic.

As it is in the whole world, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected our country Burundi and challenged all domains of

life. For youth, the pandemic has negatively affected many domains such as economic, education, social, spiritual...

In the economic domain, some young people had stopped their jobs because some businesses closed or reduced the number of workers. This multiplied the number of jobless young people who consume without producing, which is a tough problem in society. Also some young people who engage in international trade were challenged. Many conditions are attached to importing goods and these are not easy for the passengers carrying them to afford. For this reason products from abroad are very expensive. For example, in Gatumba parish young people were used to going to work and selling food, fruits or other things at Uvira in the Democratic Republic of Congo but they no longer go because the means of travel are very expensive.

The pandemic has affected our culture. In Burundi hugging is a sign of an intimate or close relationship among youth or adults; but now it is over. Some cultural games and rituals are stopped because of social distancing. The fact of wearing masks prevents young people from laughing with one another and using some gestures of communication.

Youth education had also been damaged by the pandemic. There are some who were studying abroad but they dropped out of their schools because of the fear and returned to their motherland. Others had scholarships but did not find the way to go to study. Also, foreign lecturers were not allowed by their States to travel from country to country. Some schools used online classes (with videoconferencing using the Zoom platform) which is not effective for students to follow because of connection instability, interruption of electricity and the fact that the lecturers are not present face to face. Students do not follow or ask questions effectively for their good understanding. An example is of Bujumbura Christian University where lectures from the United Kingdom were supposed to come but did not.

When describing the pandemic problems that challenged the youth here in Burundi, we cannot forget spiritual ones. Attendance in the church was affected. In a row where ten people usually sit, now only four or five persons can sit. This



has caused churches to double or triple Sunday Services in order to offer members chances of attending worship. This means that young people involved in worship teams are also divided to help in different services, for example at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Ngagara Parish and Kanyosha Parish in Bujumbura city. This fact slows down the youth ministry and also means that we don't always see our friends.

Socially, the pandemic troubles people, especially young people, who are afraid of being affected. When some young people who live in the town go upcountry, the young people there flee from them, considering them contaminated since, for them, towns are seen as the origin of the pandemic.

The Anglican Church in Burundi youth department has not yet established a project to fight against this pandemic except for the sensitization of social distancing, wearing a mask in a crowd, and washing hands - which are the measures that the Burundian State communicate everyday through the media. Buckets are available before entering the church and people have to wash their hands and follow other instructions.

CONTACT: Revd Thérance Nduwayo,
nduwayotherence7@gmail.com

COVID-19: The positive side

Toni-Ann Ewen is Spiritual Coordinator for the Anglican Youth Fellowship of the Cathedral of St Jago de la Vega in Spanish Town, Jamaica. She describes how the pandemic has brought blessing as well as suffering:

It is no secret that the outbreak of Coronavirus has caused a detrimental shift all over the world, from the death of loved ones to the breakdown of the economy; just having everyone on edge and trying to survive physically and mentally. The pandemic has definitely affected the Church community due to lockdowns and congregation restrictions, leading to many concerns about spiritual depletion, especially among youth. Despite all of this, it is a belief that COVID-19 may have also been a blessing in disguise because I have seen how it has reshaped youth ministry.

As a member of the Anglican Church and a member of the Anglican Youth Fellowship (AYF) of the Cathedral Church of St Jago de la Vega, I could see that, pre-COVID, the youth group was not as active as expected. This was due to various reasons but the reality was that many persons could not or would not attend face to face meetings, which definitely created a hole within our group. BOOM! The first case of COVID hit Jamaica in March 2020 and the numbers of infections slowly climbed the ladder until a huge spike occurred. This resulted in many things shifting to online platforms and, I must say, our AYF really stepped up to the challenge.

On 31 December 2020, I was appointed Spiritual Coordinator of the AYF and both myself and the President of the group have worked assiduously to ensure we improve the state of our youth fellowship regardless of the possibility of there being no in-person interactions. As an executive body, we put our minds together to plan a very fulfilling AYF calendar of events with the majority of these being held virtually. Events

included Movie Days, COVID-19 learning sessions, cultural expo, Bible studies, prayer sessions and other general AYF meetings which included spiritually engaging games or activities. The efforts were well received by members and we observed a consistency in the attendance by most members.



While there is always room for more improvement, especially with getting all members actively involved in AYF, we are definitely proud of our progress thus far. There has been a fresh new aura within our fellowship as youths and we have definitely bonded more within this pandemic through the virtual medium. As teen novel author Susane Colasanti once said, 'Even in a bad situation, there's always a positive side, even if you can't see it yet'. The impression at the start of the pandemic was that there would be a total breakdown in spiritual fellowship but adjustments to utilise the virtual space have proven to be effective in bringing spiritual comfort amidst the chaos all around. We are a truly blessed to be living in a time with such advanced technology.

It feels unreal day by day, but we just have to continue to pray, stay safe and keep our spiritual fellowships steady.

CONTACT: Toni-Ann Ewen, ewentoniann@gmail.com

'Youth in Palestine already face severe challenges in finding positive avenues to make their voices heard and communicate their needs to decision-makers. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented youth with even more challenges as they navigate the ongoing economic crisis and political instability. The rising potential of Palestinian youth engagement, active role and leadership in communities has been lowered as the pandemic reduced the key component of social interaction to their empowerment and further contributing to the already existing fragmentation between youth in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Israel and the Gaza Strip. Opportunities for change and youth engagement in leadership have been suppressed through the halt to governorate and government election processes.

'Further within the process of social distancing without the presence of adequate, safe, and monitored public spaces have forced large households into isolations and placed pressure on the family dynamics.

'Youth in Palestine are in need of recovery programmes that contribute to enhancing their wellbeing and societal engagement through adapted online platforms and programmes, and a serious look into alternative economic opportunities.'

Julie Raja Shihadeh, Youth Committee Facilitator, St Andrew's Episcopal Church, Ramallah, Palestine, Diocese of Jerusalem

School closures; girls more at risk

Long term school closure imposed by the pandemic in Kenya has meant that parents having to go to work and earn a living for their families have not always been able to watch over their children or make sure they are supervised by a responsible adult. This has increased the vulnerability of girls in the community with a rise in number of teenage pregnancies.

Eunice Musyimi is the Mothers' Union Community Development Coordinator in the Diocese of Machakos:

'Teenage pregnancies increased during the long closure of schools in 2020. For example, there was a girl who was in primary school, a class seven student around 13 years' old. Her father made her pregnant; he was jobless and stayed home most of the time with his daughter, while his wife went out to do casual jobs.

'The mother of the girl shared the predicament with the Mothers' Union (MU) Coordinator for Machakos Diocese. She was very disappointed, frustrated and confused on what action to take. The MU Coordinator encouraged the mother not to blame herself and helped both mother and daughter to undergo counselling to help them in that difficult situation. She herself continued offering spiritual and social support. The case was reported to the police and a legal action was taken whereby the father was jailed. The teenage girl gave birth to a daughter but she had health complications and the baby died after six months. The teenager has since gone back to school.

'In another case, a primary school girl in class eight (the last stage in primary, before joining high school) was made pregnant by a form two high school boy. Both of them were teenagers. The boy took the girl to his home and the two of them were staying in the same house. The MU Coordinator tried to intervene to get the girl back to her mother who is a widow, but the boy's parents refused to let her go. Instead they decided to care for the baby when it was born and to provide for schooling of their son and the girl. So during school breaks, both go to the boy's home.'

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is widely practised in the area of Maral Diocese in Samburu County, because it is a "cultural practice and belief" in the Samburu community. Young girls under the age of 15 years are forced to undergo the practice before they are married off to older men, denying them the opportunity to continue with education.

When schools closed in response to COVID-19, there was an increase in cases of FGM, child marriage and sexual violence because the girls were at home for a long period of time.

The practice of FGM is prohibited under the laws of Kenya Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act No. 32 of 2011. However, due to the fear of prosecution by law, the communities are still doing the harmful practice in secret. FGM has long-term physical, psychological and social consequences and it poses danger to the current and future generation of girls and women in our country.

The Revd Julia Leaduma is the MU Community Development Coordinator in the Anglican Diocese of Maralal:

'As a Mothers' Union Coordinator and a parish priest, I rescued a girl aged 15 years, who is a teen member in my parish, after she had been forced to undergo FGM. The girl's parents and the woman who performed the cut on the girl had been arrested by the police and the girl was taken to the nearest children's home.

'As one who cares for families with problems, I decided to go to court to apply for custody of the girl so that she can be under my care as she waited to join high school in July 2021. The court heard my plea and I was successfully granted custody of the girl after giving them evidence of my priesthood certificate. The girl stayed with me and my family from May 2021 until the court issued an order for the girl to join high school in July 2021. She is now in a boarding high school continuing with her studies.'

CONTACT: Mothers' Union Provincial Coordinator for Kenya, Sophia Mwaniki, mud@ackkenya.org

Te Pihopatanga o Aotearoa online

'Let peace be the pandemic, let kindness be the contagion,
let love be the miracle'

Archbishop Don Tamihere, Te Pihopa o Aotearoa

The Revd Zhane Rawiri Tahau Whelan is a 24-year-old transitional deacon in Te Pihopatanga o Aotearoa, the Maori Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand. Along with the Revd Canon Christopher Huriwai, the Ven Ngira Simmonds and Ruawhaitiri Ngatai Mahue, he is leading the Online COVID-19 response providing pastoral care and online services, and communicating key gospel messages to their people as they continue to unite against and stamp out COVID-19 from their communities. He writes:

We first went into a nationwide lockdown on 25 March 2020 and ever since we have had a live, online Night Prayer service at 7pm each Monday, Wednesday and Friday, with a Sunday Service via Facebook and a popular TikTok ministry for our younger viewers.

Since this time, New Zealand returned to what felt like pre-pandemic life, but in early August this year, the Government alerted us to a COVID-19 case of community transmission with no clear connection to the border. This case put the Te Pihopatanga o Aotearoa Online COVID Response team on standby to implement our nationwide lockdown online ministry response, which is led and implemented by a group of young clerics from the Maori Anglican Church.

On the evening of 7 August our Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced a nationwide move to a 'Level 4' lockdown, which is a total lockdown of the country where everyone stays home and there are heavy restrictions in place with only essential work and activity allowed. Our Online COVID Response team therefore announced that its online prayer services will take place twice a day at 7am and at 7pm, along with a 10am Sunday service.

This COVID Response ministry, as well as our regular broadcasting since the start of the New Zealand response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has a monthly audience of over



60,000 people and actively engages around 50,000 people. The Revd Canon Christopher Huriwai and I also have a TikTok account which we use as an extension of this ministry to share the gospel, prayer and regular dance trends sharing joy, and being a comforting faith presence amongst Generation Z. Our TikTok account currently has 19,500 followers.

Throughout this time as we unite together as what our Prime Minister calls the 'team of 5 million', we strive to be a loving, vibrant, dynamic faith/church presence in the homes of our people, intentionally sharing messages of hope, peace and love during this time of uncertainty. We are sharing the gospel and a beautiful music ministry, and leading our audience in prayer, as well as advocating for Government pandemic guidelines and for members of our community to get the vaccine as an act of love for our neighbour. We will keep this online ministry going not only because it brings so much hope to so many people in our present context but also because this is, and will be, the future of how we connect and build community with the generations to come.

CONTACT: zhane@tairawhiti.org.nz

'I turn my gaze to God': Young voices from Mexico

Alexa lives in Guadalajara, Jalisco:

I belong to the Church of Christ congregation in the Western Diocese of Mexico. One morning I woke up expecting my life to be normal like every other morning, not understanding the magnitude of the situation in which we were about to become immersed. As a young woman I did not see or believe what was happening; I went out to the streets with my friends and I went to work while the media bombarded me with alarming information on what was happening worldwide, with the deaths of people increasing day by day.

Fear seized me and the entire population, a fear that paralyzed me, not to touch, not to hug the people we love and my friends. It was worrying and sad to see how the media and people who were not well informed were creating panic in the

population. People driven by fear began to buy groceries in an excessive way and I wondered, 'what about the other people who just have enough money to buy a few things?' Those who cannot go out to work and do not have the resources are more disadvantaged. When people buy more than they consume, they are leaving others with real need without resources. I saw with sadness how the economy of the 'have's' and 'have not's' was exposed - the two social classes that prevail in our country, the poor and the rich.

With this pandemic we have discovered how fragile and defenceless we are and we sadly see that we are not prepared for such an event. Human beings boast of having great technologies and sometimes of being the centre of the universe because of their intelligence, and yet a tiny organism has made us tremble, showing us how weak we are. I turn my gaze to God and pray for those people who are suffering the loss of a loved one and for those who are in hospital. And I invite you to be people of faith and prayer.

Finally, we cannot let ourselves be won over by this mentality of scarcity and fear. We have to control ourselves and use our wisdom and emotional intelligence. In this situation we cannot think only of ourselves. The more we inform ourselves, the better decisions we will make.

Ana had just started her first formal job when the pandemic struck:

It was difficult for me because I had no experience and within two weeks of starting work, they sent us to work from home. So I had to learn almost alone, solve problems at a distance, and learn to communicate with my co-workers via WhatsApp.

Unfortunately, like many families, in January 2021, I had a very close family loss due to COVID-19, the first in my life. My cousin David, who had just turned 36, was a great artist with an incredible sense of humour that always made you laugh. He had many projects, some already in place and others in mind. I had seen him 15 days before he passed away, the day before his birthday. He told us that he was going to be 36 years old, that he was almost in the middle of his life. How could we have imagined that 15 days later he would leave this earthly world.

Now I give thanks and value daily what I have, my family, my true friends, my health, my body and what it allows me to do. I have learned not to give so much importance to superficial things and I have started to practise things that I have always wanted to do such as painting with watercolour, making pots and practising yoga. Most importantly, I have learned to value the present time and not to wait for tomorrow. Tomorrow I don't know if I will still be here.

'I have become much closer to my grandparents. We have always been close but now we are like *muéganos* (a Mexican candy made of several pieces stuck together with caramel). I have taught them how to Zoom and we make cupcakes together. Thanks to my dad I have had a great collection of masks of all colours. My father works in the hospital and sees the COVID-19 cases, and he does not want my mother or me to get sick.'

Génesis Rosales, Anglican Church of Mexico

Iris Itzel Chablé González was 14 years old and about to take exams to obtain a place in high school:

My graduation plans, 15-year parties for many friends, travel, and activities in my church were all postponed. Because of being confined to home, I had to adapt and make my own activity schedules. With my parents we made a new routine, which at first I liked a lot, since my parents stayed at home and I could live with them more. This was for three months and then my parents were called to go back to work, and I stayed at home with my grandmother. Having virtual classes made me think that actually being with teachers and colleagues was part of learning. It was quite difficult for me to have to adapt to this new way of working, but it made me put more effort into having to pay attention and seek more information on my own.

Currently I maintain communication with some friends and attend the Eucharist on Sundays at the Christ the King preaching station. I am very pleased to see all those people who attend the Eucharist, and that the Lord continues to move their hearts. We take care of each other and we try to maintain communication. I am also in groups of my church with which I interact from time to time. I try to distract myself with what I really enjoy, without leaving aside my responsibilities, and I manage a more than excellent communication with my parents.

Judith Galindo Juarez is a student of computer engineering:

At the beginning of 2020 I was in my last year of high school, I wanted to eat the world in one bite; I liked going out to have fun, I went to parties, toured parks or museums, met with friends, participated in activities at my church, spent enough time at home to do my homework and rest, but then the health emergency was declared that led us to lockdown.

Every day I have kept in communication with my friends. I have learned that strong friendships are maintained under any circumstance. Although the times we have met are few, when we are together it is as if no time has passed.

At home, we received new members of the family. At first we were only four people and three dogs. Now we have added chickens, roosters, turkeys, ducks and quail. Fresh eggs are

excellent in the morning. Also, we set up a greenhouse together with a vegetable garden. These activities consume a part of our time but also promote family bonding.

I miss being together with others in the classroom. For me it is very difficult to take the first step when meeting someone and it is even more difficult online. I have played the lone ranger but my goal is to make friends soon.

This is my new normal. I do not hope to return to my previous normality but I want to continue knowing all the possibilities that the current situation offers us, now and in the future.

Please take the IAFN survey

We hope you have been informed and inspired by this newsletter. The International Anglican Family Network (IAFN) is an official network of the Anglican Communion. reconciliation. You can help us to be truly representational of Anglican life and experience around the Communion.

Please complete the short survey at <https://bit.ly/2ZkFlz5> where you can choose to respond in English or another language. This will take approximately 10 minutes. Survey deadline: 31 October.

Your input will help IAFN's Management Committee to know how best to serve the priorities and goals of network members around the world. The survey is anonymous. We will not ask for your name, and will only ask for the name of your Diocese, Member Church or organisation.

Thank you in advance for providing valuable information.

God of hope and compassion,

You love your little ones.

We pray for children and young people around the world whose lives are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We remember those who have missed out on education and who miss their friends and family members, and those in communities where healthcare and social security are inadequate.

Heal the sick.

Accompany the isolated.

Comfort families who have lost loved ones.

Help the leaders of nations and health authorities to make wise decisions for the good of all your children.

Lead us to look after one another, and hold us all in your merciful love. Amen.

