

## **FNMI update for Mishamikoweesh Water Partnership**

Just before National Indigenous Day 2024, the Executive Director of the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund informed members of Pimatisiwin Nipi (Living Waters) about the success of Advent Conspiracy 2023 among several non-Indigenous Anglican Churches in southern Ontario. In conversations with Bishop Lydia Mamakwa from the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh, a meeting was arranged with the Shibogama Tribal Council with Bishop Mamakwa and the Reverend David Franks making a presentation in October 2022. Chief Eddie Mamakwa from Kingfisher Lake First Nation accepted the invitation to move forward with a plan to bring safe, clean, and running water to his community by purchasing a second water truck. Kingfisher Lake has a population of 500 people on the reserve with about half of their households receiving water from the updated water treatment plant by truck and held in water tanks. Roads are rough, wear and tear on their water truck takes a toll on this vehicle, and problems getting replacement parts and mechanics to make repairs are difficult and take time. Without a water truck, households need to bring their own containers to the water treatment plant and bring these containers to each of these homes. Under these conditions, Chief Eddie Mamakwa and Council decided to put another \$80,000 towards the donations received from parishes connected with Pimatisiwin Nipi to purchase a new water truck. Advent Conspiracy 2023 and 2024 raised \$150,000 towards the purchase of a new water truck built by Fort Garry Fire Trucks in Winnipeg. This company also builds water trucks and sewage vacuum trucks for use by a variety of communities in northern Ontario and Manitoba. In March 2024, a new water truck was delivered after the ice road was opened to Kingfisher Lake. Like many Indigenous communities, populations on reserve are growing so new housing is also needed. **Additional donations made to Mishamikoweesh Water Partnership beyond the \$150,000 for the cost of the water truck for Kingfisher Lake during Advent Conspiracy 2024 were received by the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund. As a result, almost \$50,000 is being held by PWRDF for further projects. Later in July 2024, Bishop Mamakwa gathers the leadership both clergy and laity in Thunder Bay. The Executive Director Will Postma and a member of Pimatisiwin Nipi will meet with Bishop Mamakwa and Indigenous Anglicans to develop a way forward in our Mishamikoweesh Water Partnership.**

Chief Eddie Mamakwa and Council succeeded with their plan to obtain funding from the federal government for two infrastructure projects. In June 2022, Indigenous Services Canada invested \$38.7 M to build a new school. As Bishop Mamakwa has communicated to Trinity by a video clip and in a letter, the plan made it possible to educate children and youth from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 10, keeping youth at home instead of sending them to Pelican Falls or Thunder Bay for the beginning of high school. One wing of the new school was constructed for public school aged children and youth while a second wing was constructed for high school students. Rooms for Elders and Knowledge Keeper were included in the design so children and youth could learn to speak Oji-Cree as well as their cultural heritage and traditional spiritual practices. The Maryann Aganash Memorial School opened in September 2023. Chief Eddie Mamakwa also obtained funding from the federal government to build an additional 30 homes in Kingfisher Lake. Like many communities in northwestern Ontario, small three-bedroom homes with one bathroom often become home for large extended families, sometimes with more than 10 members living together. The need to generate hope in youth and young adults continues to be a challenge.

In the future, donations to the **Mishamikoweesh Water Partnership** could fund spare parts and repairs to water and wastewater trucks, improvements in water treatment facilities, upgrades in plumbing in existing homes, acquisition and installation of water filtration systems to improve water quality, water related training for youth and young adults, and even another water truck. From my visit to Pikangikum in 2022, gravel lanes near Indigenous homes so that water and wastewater trucks can reliably get to the water and wastewater tanks from the road reduces the risk of having a vehicle get stuck during rainy weather and spring thaws. My son-in-law recounts a community disaster that happened during his year of teaching in Iqaluit when all three water trucks broke down and needed repairs at the same time.

In an article in the **INSIGHT** section of the Toronto Star published on May 25, 2024, Ernie Daniels pointed out that the infrastructure gap between Indigenous communities and municipalities in Canada continues to be problematic. The current mechanisms and policies to address the substantive inequalities in access clean water, adequate and appropriate housing, health care, schools, energy systems, and telecommunications will take another 130 years. The federal government has admitted that the 2030 goal will be impossible to reach in addressing these historic and systemic inequalities. Daniels suggests some strategies to move forward. Daniels notes that the investment of federal funds into the First Nations Finance Authority would develop considerable financial equity to meet plans for infrastructure improvements through Chiefs and Council among First Nations, generating Indigenous businesses and building skills among Indigenous workers. Indigenous communities hold wealth communally so creativity will be needed to assess the value of Crown Land on their traditional territories as well as the gifts of Mother Earth sustained by these land and waters. Prior to first contact, Indigenous Peoples sustained themselves on their traditional territories, caring for the most vulnerable and for this creation.