



**NORTHERN SPIRIT
REGIONAL COUNCIL**
THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA



Letter from the Regional Council Chair re wildfires

16 May 2023

On the first day of our recent Regional Council Annual meeting, May 4, some of those present heard that their home communities were being evacuated because of fires that were out of control.

Those who live in Drayton Valley are still not able to return and have been told that they may have another week, at least, before that can be considered. Fox Lake, one of three communities of the Little Red River Cree Nation, has lost more than 100 structures.

Last night as I watched the news, the colour of the Alberta map has been almost totally covered in red with fire warnings. Fort St John is under an evaluation alert for 20,000 people. The official update from the Alberta government at 5 p.m. told us that 15 communities have been evacuated, 17 more are getting ready for that eventuality. 19,294 people were counted as having been forced from their homes.

In Camrose this morning, the smoke is rolling in even though we are lucky enough not to be immediately close to a fire. I am aware how very quickly that could change. I cannot imagine how dense and difficult this must be to live in or how dense and difficult this will be for Fire Fighters and First responders to work in. As many people are being asked to walk away from the flames, they are walking into them.

Northern Spirit Regional Council Executive and staff are very aware that this situation is going to be devastating for a large number of people – not just members of our church, but also the communities that they call home.

We are in touch with the national church and we are monitoring where support is needed as well as where some of our partners are already providing help. We want to be part of a strong network that can offer different options for different needs.

Our concentrated, prayerful energy is sorely needed. Please hold in prayer all affected communities and their people: those facing loss of life and homes or businesses;



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firefighters and first responders; leaders who must make quick decisions; and God's creation, as it experiences this painful devastation.

There are many options to offer monetary support (whichever one works for you, please be sure you tell the recipient who you are and what the funds are for.)

- The Red Cross. There is 3 to 1 match from the Alberta and federal governments until June 3. [Click here for the link to donate.](#)
- If you prefer to give through the United Church, you can donate to the Regional Council's Emergency Fund, and distribution of those funds will be worked out as longer- term needs become clearer. You can donate through CanadaHelps: (note a small service charge is held)
<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/explore/charities/?q=northern+spirit+regional+council>

You can also e-transfer: NorthernSpirit@united-church.ca

Or mail: 13535-122 Avenue NW, Edmonton AB T5L 2V7. In all cases, please note that the donation is for the Emergency Fund- 2023 wildfires.

If you want to support a particular community, then we invite you to check out online if they have created their own donation options. We draw your attention to Little Red River Cree Nation and Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, both of which have suffered extensive damage. The latter has no public fundraiser at this time, but you're invited to look for updates. [Click here for the Little Red River Cree Nation/ Fox River area evacuee fundraiser.](#)

In all of these things and times and places, let us not forget that God is our strength, and our courage but that we are the hands and feet of God's love in this place.

We are called to be bold in our discipleship so let's be bold in offering our support.



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Holy One,
We are grateful for your presence with us in times of great challenge.
May we feel you with us now as we find ourselves living in uncertainty,
with fear, with sorrow and with compassion.

We pray
that the multiplying fires can be dampened and turned from their destructive paths;
that firefighters and first responders, who show us such courage, will be safe;
that those who are separated from their communities will experience amazing
hospitality;
that those who worry about the loss of homes, of belongings, of animals, of their
livelihoods will find strength in the compassion that surrounds them.

May this unfolding experience,
remind us of the power of creation and our responsibility to care for it
create within us stronger ties to family and friends
create within us a stronger connection to you so that we may gain strength for what
lies ahead.

In hope, for healing, we pray
Amen.

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Rev Helen Reed, chairperson, Northern Spirit Regional Council