

It's Tuesday, and I am sitting in my cool basement taking a break. And I know how lucky I am. There are so many people who don't have this opportunity.

We've watched the devastation of floods in Eastern Canada, in Toronto which we might have thought would be immune to such things – because isn't it the small places that get overwhelmed? Even our own General Council Office lost their phone systems for a while.

A week after intense rainfall and flooding roads and bridges are being inspected for safety, hundreds of people and places are still waiting for a response to their call for help. Churches, homes, resources have all been impacted by this. Those who were in trouble before, are in worse trouble now.

In Western Canada currently experiencing a heat wave that we haven't seen in decades, the wildfires are back. Fueled by the dryness of the weather, we are once again hearing of orders to evacuate as fires move to cut off access to communities, or threaten to engulf them.

And here I sit, in my cool basement, not trying to think of what I need to pre-pack just in case, not trying to plan where I need to go to be supported, to be safe.

So what should I do? What I can. I can pray – lifting up the good energy of hope that reminds us that we are part of a much bigger community, related to so many, many people that we haven't met yet. Praying connects our heart and head and reminds us that we are the hands and feet of God, called to bring hope into an unstable, unpredictable world.

There are already communities that are getting practical and offering welcome and shelter to those who are fleeing. In remembering their own experience of a year ago, Drayton Valley has named what they can offer as support to those evacuating from other places.

Sometimes we get impatient to 'do' something but we need to wait a little while until what is truly needed is clearly identified so that we don't add to the chaos. The shelter and food pieces are the highest priorities and that we need to partner with authorities to provide.

We can send funds. We have a disaster fund at Northern Spirit Region that can be used by some of our churches in needs. But you can also donate to Institutions like the Red Cross who are usually first on the ground and have experience in what is truly needed.

And here I sit, thinking of what I encourage us to jump into.

Closer to home, if we have neighbours who haven't been seen for a while in the heat – please go and check on them. What little thing can we offer to people we don't know that will share the love of God with friends and neighbours?

And here I sit, grateful for where I am, not taking it for granted at all.

*Letter from our Chair – July 2024*

Pray with me.

Holy One,

We send our prayers to you for strength and courage for all those who find themselves in unexpected circumstances that are tearing them away from their homes. Many will not know if they can return, or when they can return. This journey they are on will be long and hard.

May our hearts connect us with compassion so that we can offer each other support, empathy and fierce love in these trying times.

Open our heads to allow us to find ways to offer what we can, in ways large and small, to hold the hurting, to give comfort, to be the ways of love that your people need.

Inspired by your love, lifted by your spirit, may we be all that you need us to be in these moments.

Amen.

*Helen Reed*

*Chair of Northern Spirit Regional Council Executive*