



## **Update: Jasper United Church and the Jasper Wildfire impacts**

**November 25, 2024**

Dear members of Northern Spirit Regional Council,

As many of you know too well, on 24 July 2024, the Jasper wildfire reached the townsite of Jasper AB, and caused enormous damage and hardship. Jasper United Church's church building and manse were lost to the flames, as was the historic worship space of St Mary and St George Anglican Church. Many in the community lost everything, both homes and businesses, and members of Jasper United are amongst that number. The devastation and loss have been overwhelming.

On November 8, members of the Jasper United Church community met with Northern Spirit representatives, regional, and national staff. Executive Minister Rev Shannon McCarthy and Pastoral Relations Minister Rev Adam Hall were the main respondents to the thoughtful questions offered by the people of Jasper United. We would like to share with you some updates and the broad strokes of the conversation.

### **Expressions of gratitude**

Thank you to the many people across the wider church who contacted people in Jasper and at the regional office, donated, and expressed great concern and care. We ask you all to continue to hold the faith communities and people of Jasper in prayer.

Northern Spirit extends its deep thanks to the people of the Northern Spirit Regional Council and beyond who have so far raised over \$30,000 for the Region's Emergency Relief Trust Fund. We also deeply thank the United Church Foundation and the people of the United Church of Canada for a \$50,000 gift to cover the minister's salary. As you can imagine, fundraising is not possible for Jasper United Church at this time, and they have also lost their thrift store revenue.

We thank the people of Jasper United for the conversation with Regional Council and General Council representatives and staff. We asked for space to hear the heart, spirit, and practical needs of the congregation. We want to name and honour the enormous scope of the loss facing the congregation and individuals.

### **Voices from Jasper United**

At the meeting, people spoke to the deep importance of their relationships in the congregation, and fears that this catastrophe would end the community of faith. We heard about members' very long-term desire for full ecumenical collaboration in Jasper, and for a building that would meet community needs, including seniors' housing. Jasper United's thrift store, which they

have also lost, supported both the congregation and the community, and re-creating this is also a priority. Partnerships of various kinds were discussed, and conversation about the realities and struggles of that long-held ecumenical hope.

We talked through practical complexities about insurance and future formal collaboration with the Anglican Church. The latter has been a long-term conversation and hope whose path is now greatly affected by the fire; there are new possibilities, many uncertainties, and a great deal of grief to be held together. These are not easy conversations.

We discussed the possibility of taking a wider view on ecumenical, interfaith, and community collaboration based on both known needs and a new vision for the community of Jasper. Sacred space; a thrift shop; urgent housing needs; and discernment with the community were all raised.

We heard that the insurance process has been very difficult, and we also want to acknowledge how hard it is to hold complex processes alongside deep grief and trauma. We also heard gratitude for the online worship leadership team that was set up by ministry colleagues. At the start of Advent, for those in Jasper, Jasper United will gather in Alpine Center seniors' care facility for Sunday worship and offer a Zoom link for those who are not able to return home yet. Jasper United is grateful to Alpine for their welcome and excited that the congregation can offer welcome to any of the seniors who want to join in worship.

Even if the concerns of the moment can only be addressed far in the future, raising them now is important. We will keep talking, and balance naming needs with things taking far longer than we might think.

### **Funding and other supports**

Northern Spirit Regional Council is covering Jasper United's expenses, using the ongoing emergency relief funds generously given by donations; its operating budget as necessary; and additional significant help from the United Church Foundation.

Ongoing supports related for trauma and stress will also be crucial

The United Property Resource Corporation was formed to address property complexities, including urgent needs for housing, and the Regional Council has been working with them. The Regional Council has been in multiple good conversations with the Anglican Diocese of Edmonton and Bishop Stephen London.

### **Next steps**

Should your communities of faith, or individuals within and beyond, wish to contribute financial support to support relief efforts, you are welcome to do so by donating to the emergency relief fund of the Northern Spirit Regional Council by e-transfer to [northernspirit@united-church.ca](mailto:northernspirit@united-church.ca) or via cheque sent to the Northern Spirit office: 8510 95 Ave NW, Edmonton, AB, T6C 1Y7. **Please indicate in the memo line** that the money is being sent for **wildfire emergency relief**, and include your contact information (name, address, and phone number) for tax receipt

purposes. **If you do not provide contact information the Region will not be able to issue you a tax receipt for your donation.**

The Regional Council will continue to be in touch with the community of faith and Rev Linda McLaren frequently, and with the Anglican Diocese of Edmonton, insurance bodies, and the community as needed. We expect that this will be a long, slow process that takes place in the context of ongoing efforts in the wider community. Your Regional and personal care and support as Christ's body will be needed for the long term.

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Image: *Aurora Borealis over Jasper National Park*, by [Sara Bach](#) on [Unsplash](#)