



**ST. KATERI PASTORAL CENTRE
ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF WHITEHORSE**

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August 12, 2018

To All Clergy, Lay Pastoral Associates, and Parishioners, Diocesan Pastoral and Finance Councils members,

RE: Update on Telegraph Creek, BC Fire Situation

This letter is to provide you with an update on the wildfire situation in Telegraph Creek, BC where the Diocese of Whitehorse has a mission, St. Theresa's Mission, which was run by Josh and Denise Grimard.

The Alkali Lake Fire near Telegraph Creek was sparked by lightning during the night of Wednesday, August 1st. Thursday morning the fire was reported to be only 2 hectares but in the next 24 hours, with record drought conditions and strong winds, the fire grew rapidly. By Friday afternoon Telegraph Creek was out on evacuation alert and most of the elders, young children, and medically vulnerable persons were sent out by bus. Overnight Friday the fire continued to burn and the first home was lost. By Saturday early afternoon an evacuation order was in place and the residents of Telegraph Creek were given only 30 minutes to vacate the town. The RCMP ran door to door, pounding on every door and wrapping up houses with police tape after checking that they were empty. The police sirens were running this whole time and smoke was pouring over the hills. It was an extremely traumatic experience for the residents of Telegraph Creek. Many brave heavy equipment operators and firefighters stayed behind to fight the fire but at 1am the fire was completely out of control and acting very aggressively and people on the ground were pulled out of Telegraph Creek. Machine operators literally jumped off their machines and ran for their lives. By Tuesday morning it was confirmed that 27 homes in Telegraph Creek had been burnt to the ground (approximately 40% of the structures in Telegraph Creek). The most recent count is 32 structures have been lost. It was a long and stressful day on Tuesday as residents of Telegraph Creek waited all day to receive confirmation that their homes had been indeed lost. We were told that the Church St. Teresa's Mission and the rectory were burned to the ground.

There is much suffering among the families from Telegraph Creek and I, along with a team of pastoral staff at Dease Lake, Iskut, Teslin, Ross River and Watson Lake, are doing our best to provide comfort and spiritual ministry. There are also many people who have gone above and beyond to do everything possible to protect and support the community of Telegraph Creek during this very challenging time.

Thank-you to the staff at People's Haven and the Emergency Social Services who have made sure the immediate needs of the people were met. Thank you to the many Tahltan men who are fighting this fire to the bitter end, especially the TNDC crews who have been working tirelessly day and night. Thank you to chief Rick McLean and the Tahltan Central Government for their strong leadership in this time of crisis. Thank you to the BC Wildfire Services and all the firefighters who have come to fight this aggressive fire. Thank you to Samaritan's Purse for opening up their facilities to the community and for the women who have been working tirelessly in the kitchen to feed evacuees, volunteers, and the crews fighting the fire. Thank you to the Independence Grocer, Save on Foods and the Super Store Market in Whitehorse for offering groceries and toiletries for the families in Telegraph Creek. Thank you to the women who have kept the community centre open as a gathering space throughout the day. Thank you to all the families in Iskut, Terrace, Smithers, Kamloops, Whitehorse and many other communities who have opened their homes to take in the evacuees.

With this situation in mind, I ask you to join us in prayer to Our Lord during this difficult time. Thinking to the future, I would also like you to keep in mind how the Diocese may be able to help Telegraph Creek residents financially, once the community begins the long journey of recovery from this disaster.

We will keep you updated with any further news. I remain,

Yours in Christ,

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Bishop Héctor Vila