



June 2016 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ –

As I am preparing this month's message I am keenly aware that it is nearly two weeks since the evacuation of the city of Fort McMurray.

We live in the wake of unbelievable devastation; and, in the wake of incredible generosity.

With you, I give thanks to God for the generosity of those from our own communities, province, nation, and indeed, from around the world, in providing for evacuees, for the safety of the emergency crews and first responders, and for all who continue to coordinate and to plan at every level.

I know that you will continue to hold the people of Fort McMurray in your prayers. They remain displaced. There is much uncertainty. There are various forms of trauma.

I know that you will continue to welcome those who join you for worship.

I know that you will respond as you are able. Not, "remarkably," as someone said to me recently, "but as I am able."

Thank you to those who gathered last Tuesday, May 10, for a Synod hosted time of prayer and candlelighting, using *Holden Evening Prayer*, at Trinity, Edmonton. And thank you to Trinity for opening your door for our Synod to gather. I am aware that many others planned similar worship services within your own communities. Wonderful!

Last Wednesday I received correspondence from an ELCIC Pastor serving a small rural community in the Saskatchewan Synod who shared that, as the Church Council met the previous evening, they had worshipped using *Holden Evening Prayer*, at the same time our Synod hosted worship was taking place in Edmonton. Wonderful!

As you are aware, through the ABT Synod – Special Bulletin: update, conversation and planning continues with CLWR, LC-C and the ELCIC through our Synod. Church groups and congregations in Alberta are invited to apply for funds for programs they feel will benefit the congregations and people of Fort McMurray from the CLWR Emergency Fund. **Grant application forms and further details are available from our Synod Office.**

Pastor Susan Horton continues to be in regular contact with members and friends of Christ the King, Fort McMurray. Many have been inquiring as to an update regarding last week's Prayer Request (May 10) for Pastor Susan who had been admitted to hospital. She was discharged from hospital in Edmonton this past Sunday, May 15. Your prayers for continued healing are appreciated.

Pastor Horton shared with me a May 9 CBC News item from a woman forced to evacuate her home in La Ronge, Saskatchewan, during last summer's wildfires which I found helpful. Kandis Riese was forced to leave her community, with 13,000 others, in a moment's notice. She has put her experiences and her thoughts during her evacuation on paper, along with advice for evacuees and volunteers who are helping out. I have edited the article which you will find below. The article in its entirety can be found here:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/sask-evacuee-fort-mcmurray-1.3569008>

Dear sisters and brothers. There will be further updates to our Synod. We know that as the days go by, other events will begin to dominate media reports and people's attention. This is when we will be needed the most to walk with and support our sisters and brothers.

We continue to pray: *Our Lord and God, grant us grace to know your love in whatever we face. Give us patience and thankfulness, even in our pain, anxiety or loss; and move us with compassion and tenderness for our afflicted neighbours; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen* (Recovering from Trauma, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*; Pastoral Care, pg. 188).

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

*In Christ Jesus –
Shalom,
+Larry*

*The Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer, Bishop
Synod of Alberta and the Territories
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada*

Spirit -Led Leadership - Hope-Filled Discipleship - Innovative Tradition - Collaborative Partnerships

May 9, 2016 CBC News

An Open Letter to Everyone ~ About Evacuees

This is based on my experience as an evacuee during the largest evacuation in Saskatchewan's history in July 2015 because of forest fires.

It needs to be stipulated first that I considered myself one of the very fortunate evacuees for several reasons. The first reason being that I was extended kindness and generosity from

people by way of offering their homes as a place of refuge for me. The second reason, I was able to take my vehicle and fill it with what I valued most. Other evacuees were not so fortunate.

A police officer came to my home and told me I had to leave and it would be best to do so within the hour. Though my hometown had been shrouded with smoky air and burned pine needles for a couple weeks and I was aware of forest fires in the area, I refused to believe that this would lead to a mandatory evacuation. I was not prepared for this. I had nothing packed. I had not slept for two days. I was, at that point, racing around my home packing up while fueled by adrenaline and fear — preparing to drive two and a half hours south.

Here are some things to know about evacuees

Evacuees need you.

Evacuees are traumatized

After fleeing their homes, evacuees are consumed with fear and dread.

Evacuees feel helpless

Evacuees are fearful and agitated.

Evacuees are sad and angry.

Evacuees feel lost.

Evacuees are dealing with uncertainty.

Evacuees are restless.

Evacuees experience deep loneliness.

Evacuees worry constantly.

Evacuees constantly think about other evacuees.

Evacuees sigh heavily — a lot.

Evacuees can initially appear very disoriented.

Evacuees are different people than you know them to be.

Evacuees may switch gears many times a day going from sad and lethargic to angry and restless. They may sit for lengths of time in a zombie-like state appearing to stare off into nowhere. Let them.

Evacuees may be agitated and pacing back and forth and exhibit subtle signs of self-soothing. Let them. Evacuees may be very sad and cry a lot. Let them.

Evacuees may want to talk excessively and repeatedly about their traumatic experiences related to the fires and the evacuation. Let them.

Evacuees may be very withdrawn and not want to be asked questions about their traumatic experience. Don't ask them (but be there to listen when they do talk about it).

Evacuees may have a loss of appetite. Have food available to them at all times anyway.

Some evacuees go into overdrive and need to keep busy. This sometimes results in OCD-inspired cleaning and organizing of a host home. Let this happen but be sure not to let it continue throughout the entire evacuation time. If you are hosting evacuees allow them to contribute to daily tasks when they are ready to do so.

Evacuees seek information

Don't be alarmed by what appears to be an obsessive and excessive use of social media, texting, and phone calls. Evacuees are trying to find each other (family members and friends). Everyone who knows and cares about an evacuee is trying to contact them. The excessive use of social media as an "information getting" tool will continue throughout the entire evacuation time. It is common for evacuees to be checking social media frequently (I mean VERY frequently as in every fifteen minutes if not more). Evacuees will be watching news media in the same way. Seeing a familiar face on the news is comforting to an evacuee.

Evacuees are grieving

Whether evacuees have lost their home to fires or not, they are ALL grieving. Evacuees are overwhelmed by tremendous loss they are now faced with. This is an excruciating painful time. During the evacuation time evacuees often are unable to see that there is an eventual end to the plethora of emotions they are experiencing. It does not matter how long the displacement phase of the evacuation is – it seems to last forever!

Not only is there loss of physical structures (your home, your business, your favourite grocery store) there is grieving over the actual municipality itself. Many people become emotionally attached to the municipality in which they live. I believe this to be magnified exponentially when it is your hometown. The destruction of the natural environment is devastating to people who love and appreciate nature. If buildings burn down in the center of a city, it is devastating BUT new buildings can be built in a relatively short period of time compared to the reforestation of nature that can take years. Keep in mind as well that the natural environment is home to wildlife that is now displaced as well and in many cases life has been lost. Yes, that too is on the mind of evacuees.

Evacuees are financially stressed

An evacuation is expensive! When you leave your home abruptly and under duress you don't always pack up what is needed. Some people leave their homes with nothing more than what they are wearing. Clothing is needed. Personal care products are needed. Food is needed. This all costs money that was not part of a regular planned budget. Evacuees spend extra money trying to keep their children entertained. Child evacuees no longer have the comfort of their neighbourhood friends to hang around with. They are put in unfamiliar territory with unfamiliar people. Children are known to be adaptable but children are also very observant and intelligent. They are witness to the stress of their parents who are trying very hard to conceal their own worry by keeping children distracted while away from all that is familiar and comforting to them. During evacuation time many evacuees experience the loss of wages. This does not always end when the evacuation does. Places of work are sometimes destroyed by fires and need to be reestablished and rebuilt. The loss of revenue for businesses is phenomenal — local businesses owned by local people need the support of local people. There is a continued ripple effect to a municipality's economy. This can be felt for years after an evacuation.

Evacuees do not want to be a burden

Evacuees want to be home. They don't want to need the help of others but they have no choice. This adds to their stress. Evacuees know they can be an imposition to others (even if you reassure them they are not). Please be patient with evacuees. Please be there for them and genuinely offer support.

Evacuees are deeply grateful for your help

Though the roller coaster of emotions and upset is what you will see most, evacuees are indeed thankful. They may not express this to you but keep in mind they know it and feel it.

Insights into supporting an evacuee

Tell an evacuee what you are willing to do for them. Refrain from saying "Call me if you need anything." Take the proactive approach by offering what you can "I have bath towels and clothes for you." "I have a spare bedroom. It is yours for as long as you need it." "I would love to have you come spend a couple weeks with me. There is lots of room."

Some evacuees are further drawn into despair by the lack of routine during the evacuation time. If the evacuee is ready and you are in a position to do so, please offer an evacuation-time employment opportunity to the evacuee. This will help alleviate some of the financial stress and help an evacuee feel less helpless.

If you are able to take a few days off work to help an evacuee settle into their evacuation host home please do so. You would be willing to help someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one and evacuees are going through a very similar experience. Evacuees are often in various stages of the grieving process.

Do your absolute best to refrain from judgmental thoughts and comments (even though you may not notice you are doing this). If evacuees are smokers, it is likely they will be smoking a lot more. If evacuees consume alcohol, it likely they will be consuming a lot more. This is temporary. Bringing it to the attention of a stressed evacuee only adds to their already overwhelming stress. Again, I ask for your patience. This does not mean you are expected to allow smoking and alcohol consumption in the host home if this is not your norm. It is ok to set out a cigarette butt disposal container outside your house with a lawn chair. I am not encouraging unhealthy behaviours but evacuation time is generally not an effective time for dealing with an addiction. Encourage healthy engagement by inviting evacuees to go for a walk with you. Get outside into nature whenever possible. Let the evacuee know you are working on a project and want them to join in. If you have a connection to someone who has a skill that might be of interest to the evacuee, invite them over and allow the evacuee some healthy interaction and productive time.

Be sure to encourage evacuees to drink plenty of water. Being stressed and grieving is exhausting and dehydrating. Don't ask evacuees if they want water, just give it to them.

Evacuees are individuals with similar struggles and with very different struggles. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to knowing the needs of evacuees. If you are so inclined to support

evacuees in way, please do so. If you can be a host home for evacuees that is an absolute gift. Yes, there will be challenges but at the same time it is a temporary arrangement. Evacuees will recover from the trauma at their own pace. Recovering from the trauma does not happen during the evacuation process. It happens later and it can take an exceptionally long time. Always know this is not what the evacuee ever wanted to experience.

Patience and more patience is essential when helping evacuees. Once all the devastation of the fires has been dealt with and the rebuilding (physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually) is accomplished — yes, it will be, you can expect evacuees to be taken back to this traumatizing time in their lives whenever another natural (fire) disaster occurs anywhere on the planet. I believe previous evacuees can relate to this during this painful time for all who have an association with Fort McMurray.

Kandis Riese, two-time evacuee - northern Saskatchewan wildfires