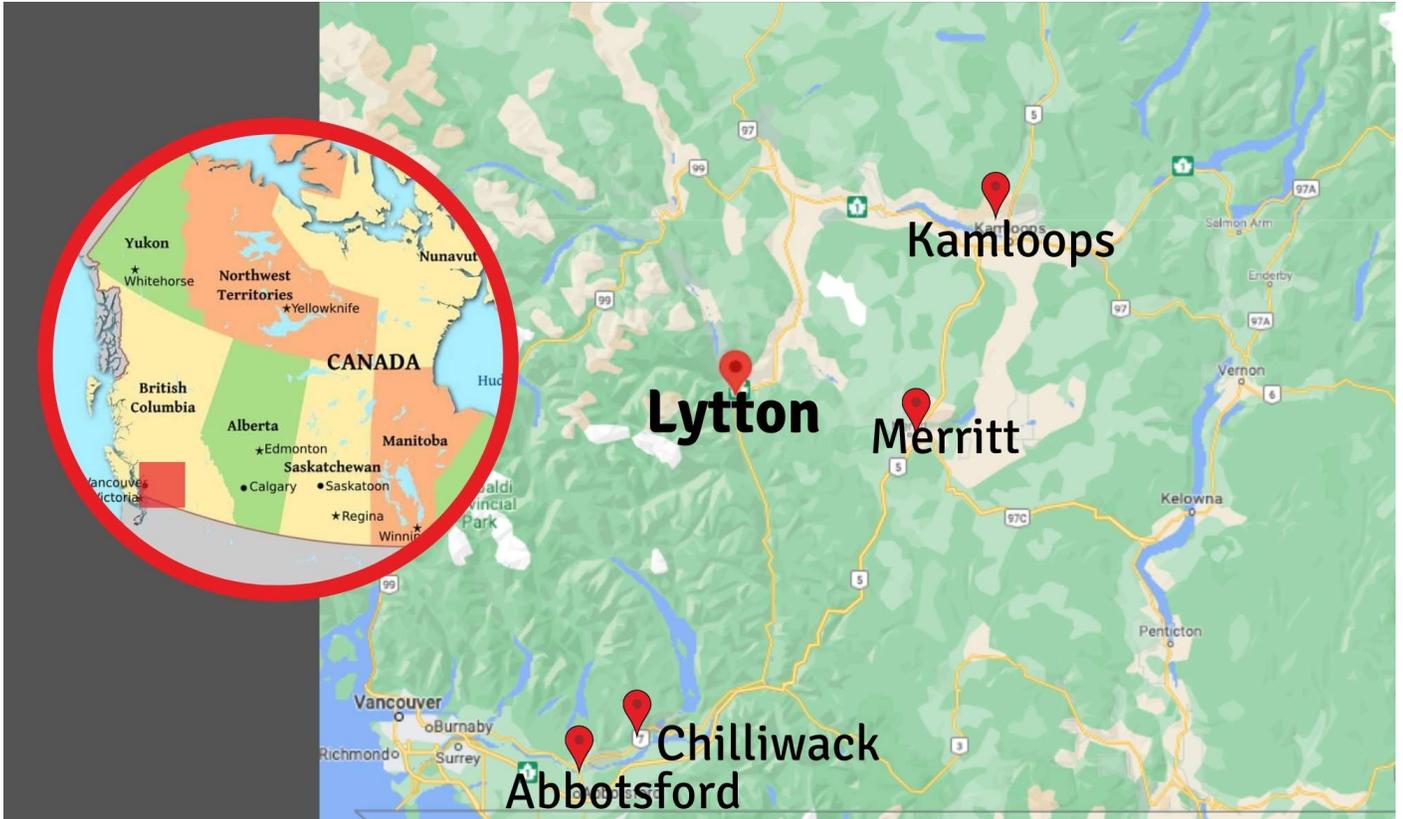


Statement on the Lytton Fire

From Archbishop Lynne McNaughton



On June 30, 2021, a devastating fire rushed through Lytton, Lytton First Nations and the surrounding area. From the moment news came of this traumatic event, the Territory of the People's local priests, wardens and members of the Lytton Parishes were on the front line, helping neighbours. The Parish Hall at All Saints, Shulus near Merritt stayed opened 24 hours a day to provide a gathering place for families and a place to get a meal. Discretionary funds from Territory parishes, the wider church and an emergency grant of \$5,000 from PWRDF have been disbursed to ensure the Anglican community responds to the needs of people we hear about, or to those who have asked for help. This includes cash for gas, food, meals in restaurants, furnishing and rent. Offering rides to people without vehicles and transporting furniture has also become an important part of the ministry.

The fire forced people to scatter in all directions to Merritt, Kamloops, Chilliwack, Abbotsford and other communities. More than 1,200 people took refuge with family and friends, in hotels, evacuation centres and campgrounds throughout B.C. This spreading out

has made it hard for people to stay in touch with family and friends. Those who lost their homes have no central place to gather or to learn what is going on back home in the Lytton area. The scattering has challenged the leadership team in the parish and Territory to respond to those in greater need. Lytton Parish leadership – despite losing their own homes and all financial and parish records– have been among the scattered, and have found creative ways to visit with neighbours and offer support to those who need assistance across the province.

Those left behind in the surrounding area and on the west side of the Fraser River also lost their community. All their central services were located in the village of Lytton. A trip for groceries or to the bank now means an hour or more drive. Those without transportation and resources are finding it a challenge to just maintain day-to-day life, and parish leadership continues to provide transportation whenever possible.

Those who didn't lose homes are also feeling the effects of this trauma. "This is our home, and what makes it special is the people," says Pastoral Elder (in training) Ernie Michel. He wondered, with the Territory Interim Steering Committee, how can we give leadership to ensure that all people affected will be heard and their needs considered as we begin the rebuilding of a new community again? The Pastoral Elders have reminded us that the whole community needs our support and friendship. We know that prayer, alongside the practical help we can offer, is vital. The needs of those who lost everything are our priority, but we are aware that people who lost their community are also hurting.

Those in leadership in the Village of Lytton and Lytton First Nation have also lost homes and livelihoods, making the long-term planning more challenging. The loss of the town and band offices has made the work of rebuilding and resettling community members a slow process. Provincial and Federal responses seem to be slow, adding to a difficult and perplexing response.

Housing in the area was already limited and now finding homes for more than 1,200 people is extremely difficult. With winter coming, summer temporary homes will not be adequate, emergency funding for hotel rooms is coming to an end, and finding suitable rentals is almost impossible. Lytton and Nlaka'pamux people are dispersed and have huge needs. It will take a coordinated effort by many to assist with the rebuilding of their community.

An increased number of COVID cases in the Lytton area this fall has focused the need for stronger restrictions on people in the area. This has also posed a problem for those who have been displaced and looking for housing and employment. It has also added to the challenges of responding.

We continue a ministry of presence, listening and giving help where we can, no questions asked, simply listening and doing the best to help those most in need. More often than not we

hear from people, “We are okay now but we will need help to find housing soon,” or “Can you help my friend, family or neighbour who has greater needs than me?” We are aware that many do not have access to a phone to communicate with the wider community and local folks are doing the best to help connect people with family, friends, potential landlords, the bank and employment.

From the experiences of the 2017, 2018 and 2019 fires, we learned that it is not long before funds from the Red Cross and other organizations will run out. The Territory was most effective in supporting people’s longer-term needs. With this knowledge, the Administration Committee at its Sept 23 meeting approved a mandate setting up a Lytton Fire Fund committee. The Committee will be made up of the following local people:

- Peggy Chute, the parish treasurer, who lost her home and is current living at the lower mainland,
- John Haugen, a warden, who lost his home and is living in Boston Bar,
- Amy Charlie, a Pastoral Elder, who has been evacuated twice this summer,
- The Rev Angus Muir, the local priest and on evacuation alert until the end of August,
- Heather White-Aie, a local school teacher and also on evacuation alert until the end of August.

These people know the community and local partners, who together will disburse funds in a fair, open and transparent process. Please pray for this special group of people who, despite great personal hardship, are willing to reach out to all who need help at this time.

As this update is being written, the people of Lytton and area have not been allowed back into the community due to unsafe conditions. The Territory received news from the insurance adjustor that St. Barnabas Anglican Church, Parish Hall and Rectory remain standing with surprisingly minor damage to the outside. We are told our first look inside St Barnabas will happen on September 23, with the local priest, warden and insurance adjustor being allowed in to assess the condition but it appears that as one of the few buildings left in the community it will become an important gathering place for the community.



Sadly, the historical St. Mary and St. Paul (left) located on Lytton First Nation land, was totally destroyed. Known locally as the Cathedral of the Nlaka'pamux, a great many artifacts and piece of Anglican Church history were lost in the Lytton Fire.

We are grateful for those who have donated to support ministry to those affected by the Lytton Fire. We were blessed to have funds come immediately from General Synod, Dioceses across the country, the Society of St. John the Evangelist, Province of

BCY Synod and many others individuals and organizations. We thank you for the trust you have placed in us to continue the ministry in this fragile area of our Church. We are grateful to PWRDF who immediately sent us \$5,000 through their In-Canada Emergency Response program. We continue to work with them to develop a plan for the other funds (approximately \$45,000) that have been raised. We are confident that the Lytton Fire Fund Committee will give appropriate ongoing support to the people who need it.

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