



DIOCESE OF KOOTENAY
The Anglican Church of Canada

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The Most Rev. Dr. Lynne E. McNaughton, *Bishop*

August 21, 2023

Dear People of the Diocese of Kootenay,

It is with great sadness that we now are able to confirm from photos taken by boat that Okanagan Anglican Camp (OAC) sustained immense damage in the wildfire last Thursday evening August 17. The camp infrastructure including the dining hall, staff residences, Program and Craft hut (newly constructed during Covid) and Kootenay hall are completely gone. We will still need to be on site to see the full extent further up the hill, and that may not happen for some time.

It also seems clear that the former maintenance worker's house occupied by Shea McLean is gone. We express our condolences to Shea for the loss of her home, and of course will be working with her to ensure that both short term and long term she is able to rebuild her life in a good place.

We are grateful there was a successful evacuation of all campers and staff.

The destruction of the camp, trees and buildings, is a huge loss for those of us who have had recent or long ago wonderful experiences of camp on that beautiful sacred ground. As soon as it is safe to do so, we will plan a gathering there to give thanks for the camp as it was, to remember and lament together. That lament is necessary for a letting go and discovering energy for rebuilding.

The last five years have seen, under Ian Dixon's excellent leadership, successful camps both financially and in terms of attendance and vibrant program. Even during Covid, when many camps had to close, OAC was able to continue offering great camps. This ministry to youth, with relation to enjoying and celebrating God's good creation, is a very important part of our Diocesan life and mission.

At our next Diocesan Council meeting in early September we will consider next steps and plan for necessary stages of rebuilding. The first stage will be damage assessment, clean up, and insurance. Beyond that we will plan for current and future needs, exploring various options of ministry on the site going forward. Ian had already been, before this summer, exploring options with the OAC board for winterizing buildings to expand program use, exploring OAC as a site for a new monastic prayer community or another form of contemporary

youth ministry on a farm, a garden, or a forestry project. We can look at temporary portable buildings for next summer.

We will consult with experts about tree planting and helping the earth and the forest recover.

As early as it is safe to do so this fall, we will hold a prayer service at the camp to grieve for what has been lost, to give thanks for what has been. Lamenting together will help us to let go and be energized to face the work ahead of revisioning this ministry.

Please read the communication from Director Ian Dixon to the wider community of OAC that also includes information on how to donate towards rebuilding (*included following this letter*). Below, you will see a couple of pictures from the water, the emptiness where the dining hall stood. You will also see that although most of the dock burned, the large white Cross at the end of the dock remains standing. As always the cross is the sign for us that God brings new life out of death. God will sustain us through this loss and rebuilding, that OAC will once again be a place of life-giving Christian community where children, youth, and adults can experience living in right relationship with nature and God.

We continue to pray for others who have lost their homes in this fire, those who have been evacuated, those offering care and hospitality to all affected by the fire.

Yours in Christ,

+ *Lynne McNaughton*

+Lynne





CAMP OAC
NOT JUST A SUMMER CAMP

CAMP OAC DEVASTATED BY MCDOUGALL CREEK WILDFIRE

We are deeply saddened to share that the McDougall Creek Wildfire has wreaked havoc on Camp OAC, causing the destruction of over 90% of its cherished infrastructure. While we haven't been able to physically visit the camp, we have received images taken from the water that reveal the extent of destruction. The dining hall, staff quarters, residence building, crafts and program building and the dock have been completely destroyed. In the distance, we can see that the near bathroom, showers and cabin 1 are still standing which showcases the randomness and power that fire can bring. This wildfire has caused so much destruction to our community and we are grateful all campers and staff were safely evacuated. We also share our gratitude, thoughts and prayers for all those working to fight these fires while many are dealing with loss themselves.

We look towards the future with hope for the camp and the community it serves. Camp OAC has been a part of the community for over 70 years and we acknowledge it is so much more than just a summer camp. While Camp OAC has been built around a physical location, the OAC family and legacy transcends its boundaries and we know our community will step up in a generous way to help the camp heal and rebuild.

While we don't know what the end result will be, we are committed to recreating a space that will share the same special place in our hearts - a place where youth in our community can feel loved and surrounded by nature; a space where inclusion is our priority and every camper can feel safe being who they are. The camp has never been about the buildings. It's always been about the people and the gifts they bring to create such a remarkable place.

While a formal campaign will be needed, we acknowledge that many have reached out wanting to donate at the present time. If you would like to donate to the rebuilding of Camp OAC, we are accepting donations through **CanadaHelps**. To spare you the processing fee, we ask that any large donations be made by contacting oacfinance@kootenay.info to make arrangements. This will ensure the full amount goes toward helping the camp rebuild.

We know the rebuilding process will take time but we will take it one step at a time. We hope the community will support us and we will work tirelessly to rebuild the magic that is Camp OAC.

With Love,
Ian Dixon
Director

CanadaHelps: <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/okanagan-anglican-camp-association-diocese-of-kootenay/>