May 11, 2016

My dear brothers and sisters,

As you aware, in our neighbouring province of Alberta, Fort McMurray has suffered a devastating wildfire that required the evacuation of thousands of people and caused immense damage to homes and businesses. Nearly 10% of the city has been destroyed. Miraculously, there were no fatalities as a result of the fire, thanks to the tireless efforts of dedicated and courageous first responders, emergency workers, and firefighters, and the grace of God.

The fire has already consumed more than 400,000 hectares and covers 2,290 square kilometres. It has moved away from populated areas, but is '0% contained'. The city is not yet safe; it will be at least two weeks before residents are allowed to return. Residents and businesses have a daunting task ahead to rebuild not only the structures destroyed in the fire, but also their livelihoods and their lives. We have seen and been moved by the courage of residents and workers in Fort McMurray, and have been deeply touched by the overwhelming response of Albertans and Canadians to the people who need our help.

We are bound together through communion in Jesus Christ: what affects even one member of the body of Christ affects us all, and our mission of accompaniment calls us to support our brothers and sisters. In addition to continuing to pray for those displaced by the fire, for cleanup and emergency services crews, and those who support them, you can help in the following ways:

- To assist the **Diocese of St. Paul**, a special collection in the Diocese of Victoria has been authorized and will take place either this weekend (May 14 & 15) or next (May 21 & 22). Bishop Terrio has confirmed that 50% of contributions will be used to assist the Catholic parishes and parishioners of Fort McMurray, while the other half will be forwarded to the Fort McMurray Ministerial Association for ecumenical assistance to those who have lost homes and jobs. Please make cheques payable to your parish, and mark them: *Fort McMurray Fire Disaster Relief*.
- Make a personal donation to the **Canadian Red Cross** online (www.redcross.ca) or by phoning 1-800-418-1111. The Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta have each pledged to match every dollar donated through the Red Cross. That means for every dollar you donate, $3 will go towards providing food, clothing, medicine and shelter for those most in need.

Our family needs our help. If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to donate what you are able. Thank you for your generosity, and God bless you.

In Communion,

+ *Gary Gordon*

Most Reverend Gary Gordon
Bishop of Victoria

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