



November, 2013

**TO: The Congregations and people of the United Church of Canada**  
**FROM: High River United Church**

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus the Christ.

We write to you with hearts full of gratitude for the abundance of prayers, financial support and spiritual accompaniment we are receiving as we continue to recover from the June 20, 2013 flood disaster that profoundly affected our community of High River and the wider Southern Alberta Region. Our congregation continues to be lifted by God's presence embodied in every prayer and every single gift that has come our way. We are grateful for the United Church of Canada, its congregations and individuals who embody God's presence and constantly assure us that God is with us and we are not alone.

Our community was thoroughly devastated and recovery is slow. Only now as the adrenalin wears off, the deep impact of this trauma is being felt emotionally, physically and spiritually. Our congregation is slowly coming "home" as displaced members move back to their places of residence. An estimated 1250 individuals still live in temporary housing waiting for their homes to be repaired or demolished and rebuilt. Some will not be able to return to their houses until at least the Spring 2014. Our downtown core is still mostly under construction with its small businesses located in temporary facilities.

Our congregation and its ministry staff have been about the work of rebuilding community, creating opportunities for gathering together, and slowly re-establishing regular programming all within the context of this "new normal". Our clergy have been working to help bridge and strengthen local community networking which includes a growing partnership with Provincial Mental Health Services so that emotional care can be widely provided throughout the Town of High River and the M.D. of Foothills.

We have received funding from our denomination through Alberta and Northwest Conference and Foothills Presbytery as well as many United Church congregations and members. The monies received are supporting our congregation and community in three general ways: 1) To stabilize our congregation's mission and ministry so that we can maintain our congregation's work and meet the operating costs and financial obligations we have which includes our mortgage payments, for example. 2) To cover the costs of repairs incurred by the flood and further improvements to our church building which are not covered by insurance including for example, the replacing of our front and back entry doors. 3) To provide congregational and community care that is transformative and makes a difference in the lives of others and our community.

**A COMMUNITY OF HELP, HOME & HOPE**

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This third area is in discernment. We are consulting with our denomination to address the best way to respond to the needs of our congregation and community. It is clear to us all that the scope of this work is beyond our current staffing model, must be a consultative process with our community, and reflect the best stewardship of our resources. To that end we are exploring the possibility of an additional staff appointment to help expand our capacity to offer appropriate care to our congregation and community while at the same time freeing our called clergy and church staff to do their on-going ministries. We are also exploring further ways to create a safe and supportive meeting place for our community leaders to gather with the soul purpose of listening and learning from each other. Additionally, we expect to continue bridging partnerships and networks within the community so that we can participate in the advancement of communication, sharing resources and improving our community response to the needs of its residents over the coming months.

We expect the recovery period for our area to take at least three to five years. This includes the physical building of homes and businesses as well as the spiritual and emotional recovery of our people as we heal from the trauma and grief. Your prayers are vital to this work. While the media has gone on to the next series of pressing stories, our lives continue to need the spiritual accompaniment of our wider church, as well as the ecumenical and interfaith communities.

However, we are an incredibly resilient community. We are tired, but our congregation is comprised of amazing and compassionate people who choose to gather and celebrate God's presence. We know this journey into the new normal is far from over. It is a marathon as opposed to a short sprint. We are learning to breathe, to slow our pace and trust in God's Spirit to help us develop the capacity to reconfigure our lives and once again reconcile us to God's world, including the Highwood River that courses through our Town and its surrounding Municipal District.

All that being said, we hope to be at home in our church building for the first Sunday of Advent, December 1, 2013. Our children's program is working on a presentation called The Stable We Built. The "We" includes all of you who have helped our congregation and community. One congregation member is building the Pageant's Stable and to each of its boards he is carefully adding the name of every congregation and sectors of the United Church that has assisted us.

We would like to thank the United Church of Canada, Foothills Presbytery, our ecumenical partners, and interfaith friends along with Habitat, Red Cross, Samaritan's Purse, World Renew, and Mennonite Disaster Services, as well as all levels of Government for their continuing efforts to help us rebuild and re-establish our congregation and our community. We are profoundly grateful.

And now wherever you are, may God's power at work within us be able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. May God's loving Spirit embrace each and everyone of you.

Sincerely,

The people who gather as the congregation of High River United Church

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