

Chairperson's Letter Of Encouragement Fires January 2026

Hello friends,

Right now, fire is impacting us all in some way. For some the impact is immediate and the loss great. For others, the current fires raise past experiences. For all of us anxiety is heightened as smoke lingers and we watch and wait. At this moment we know that some members of our church have lost their homes and more, and we are uncertain about the fate of the Terip-Ruffy church building, important in the lives of its small congregation. There is also concern for people in the mountains affected by both the Walwa and the Longwood Fires. These are, for them, the latest in a series of fires with all the weight that repetition carries. There is also concern for those impacted by smaller fires. The Katamatite, Cobram and Yarroweyah areas come to mind, amongst others and I am sure there is the potential for even more before the summer is through.

I have been thinking about what gives us the strength to get through not just the initial emergency, the fire, but supports us in the days and weeks and sometimes years that follow. What strikes me is that Sunday, by Sunday, we have been preparing for just such an event and for all the upending events of life really. Sundays are like a rehearsal, bedding down the knowledge that we live in the presence of God, that God is with us in every circumstance and that because we understand God is with us, we can feel safe in our inmost being no matter what happens to us. This does not mean we will not be anxious or afraid. It just means that we have something to hold on to when we are afraid, or anxious, or both.

If I am being honest with you, sometimes I have wondered at the value of the Psalms but at moments like this they come into their own. Psalm 10, for example, speaks for many when it cries out, "Why do you stand off, why are you so aloof when so many are in trouble?" On and on it goes until everything is vented and what is left is trust. God will hear, God will strengthen, God will act. Psalm 27 does what most psalms do. It begins with a statement of trust, then, under pressure, trust wobbles and at the last, returns - the calm after the storm. Psalm 121 could not be more apt for this moment. *I lift up my eyes to the hills – the place where danger lurks - and ask from where will my help come and the answer leaps: My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.* Psalm 23, the older translation: *Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and staff they comfort me.* These, and words like them, have accompanied some of us, for all our lives. They sit deep in our bones, stored up against the day of need. At some point though, we have to test these words against our experience, most often at a little distance. Think of the *Footprints* poem – looking back we can see what we did not see at the time. Sometimes we need good friends around us for the times that we wobble. The question for us is how do we be that friend? How can we be that friend? In all of life we each need to make a judgement about when to speak and when to be silent and if we speak to be careful about what we say. There are times and opportunities to speak about what sustains us and there are times for restraint. There are other times and opportunities, without speech, for those schooled in Jesus' ethic of love to simply hold, comfort and aid us. To be our most deeply human in the image of God selves.

Right now, wherever you are, whatever is happening, be assured of the prayers that bring us together to an awareness of the presence of God with us. Be assured that as soon as it is safe a member of the Presbytery team will be in affected areas. Be assured that we are looking at the ongoing spiritual nurture of those of amongst us that fire has visited too regularly of late. Until then, the blessing of God whose presence is life to us, the blessing of Jesus who opened to us the way of love and the blessing of the Spirit that even now moves amongst us be with you.

Gereldine