



# SACRED HEART CHURCH

## Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón

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9/30/2020

C/o Rev. Don Gutmann

St. Clare Parish

8535 SW 19<sup>th</sup> Ave.

Portland, OR. 97219

To My Brothers and Sisters in St. Clare Parish:

I am sending you this letter with our love and gratitude as we scramble to distribute fire aid to our suffering families here in Southern Oregon. As you know, during the second week of September, this past month, our nation witnessed the outbreak of over 2000 fires on the West Coast in an event dubbed the "worst fire season in 100 years". The fires were only amplified by high, swirling winds and an intensive, dry heat wave. In Oregon alone, over 500,000 people, or roughly 10% of Oregon's state population were displaced by the flames as they were forced to evacuate. Here in Jackson County, although there was miraculously minimal loss of life, we experienced the worst fire in Southern Oregon's recorded history in terms of property damage. As fires raged in the Central Point and Shady Cove areas just to the north of Medford, the Almeda Fire burned from Ashland north, through Phoenix and Talent and into the city limits of Medford. In total, 42,000 people were displaced here, locally, from the Almeda Fire alone. At last count, 2357 homes, not including apartment buildings, were lost. Including apartment units, I estimate that 3000-4000 living units were destroyed. Phoenix, essentially, no longer exists and roughly 1/3 of Talent was destroyed as well. Ashland and Medford also incurred damage within their city limits.

In our Sacred Heart Catholic Church, so far, I have been able to confirm that at least 139 of our parish families are now homeless. We are still trying to reach a third of our parish families who were in the path of the fire so that number is likely to spike upwards in the near future. Due to dead landlines and evacuations it may be some time before we are able to locate and reconnect with all of our parishioners. Added with our neighboring Shepherd of the Valley community in Central Point and Our Lady of the Mountain in Ashland we know that at least 200 Catholic families in our area have lost their homes to the fire. Disproportionately, those hardest hit were lower income families and our local Hispanic community. With an average of five occupants per home, according to our outreach data, this translates to roughly 1000 of our faith community members that we are extending aid to. We are also joining forces with St. Vincent De Paul, other local churches, Red Cross and other civic organizations in lending material and financial aid to victims of the Almeda Fire more broadly.

This loss has not only left countless families destitute but it has also caused a wide array of other crises as well. For instance, all of the families we have been able to help so far have had several school-aged children. However, with Covid-19 restrictions in place and distance learning happening in our schools, these children have not been able to participate in school due to loss of electrical power and internet connection. Our parish Hispanic ministries have all but shut down as well. As an example, I learned just yesterday that our entire Spanish-speaking religious education department is now homeless. And, of course, social costs related to depression, marriage counseling, substance abuse, unemployment and loss of businesses, relocation and other issues are at an all-time high.

So far, our church has already distributed nearly \$70,000 of our own funds in support of fire victims in the form of money and gift cards. We have also gathered much needed material aid such as food, camping equipment and basic household items. We have helped people pay motel bills and apartment security deposits, aided in car repair, childcare and relocation expenses. Of course, we have also focused on extending much needed spiritual care to victims as well and, just last weekend, we helped coordinate an event that offered free legal aid, immigration aid and family grief counseling. Most recently, Sacred Heart staff members have specifically been requested to help coordinate with FEMA, Gov. Brown's office and La Clinica with our Spanish translators directing qualifying families to various emergency programs.

Sacred Heart is prepared to exhaust our entire upper budgetary limit of \$150,000 to aid victims while our funds last but we have also recently begun to receive donations from across the state...from awesome parishes like yours! This lends us new hope as we work daily to face this greatest crisis of my ministry career. We are also seeking assistance from various foundations and we hope to be able to distribute over \$250,000 in financial assistance to families in need. We know we are not in this alone, as just about every retail business, church and civic association in town is joining in the fight. Communities like yours also remind us that the Body of Christ is real. For the most part, I have tried to have a 24-hour turn around with the early aid we have received. Chances are strong that, by the time you read this letter, your gift will have already gone out to aid families in need, as the situation is dire. We here at Sacred Heart in Medford commit to make sure and exercise careful stewardship over the gifts that you and others have entrusted us with. Time is now of the essence with winter coming and temporary housing running out to help families relocate out of this region, as there are no rental properties remaining available here. So, from the bottom of my heart and on behalf of the fire victims of Southern Oregon, thank you for your response in our time of need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev Ken Sampson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Rev Ken Sampson

Pastor, Sacred Heart – Medford, OR.