



Press Release - June 28th, 2021

Upper Similkameen Indian Band response to Saint Ann's Church and Chopaka Lady of our Lourdes Church fire

USIB Chief & Council and community are very saddened by the sudden loss of two historical churches in the Lower & Upper Similkameen. We along with Lower Similkameen Indian Band are in disbelief of the complete disregard for our elders and ancestors and we are fully cooperating and helping with this investigation.

Like LSIB, we understand the anger surrounding Residential Schools across our country, but we implore all of you to reach out for supports and help each other to express your anger and emotions in a different way. Putting our lands, wildlife, and members at risk is not the way.

We thought as leaders it was important for everyone to learn what this church meant to those who cherished it in our community. Please read the following statements from our Elder Carrie Allison and Chief Bonnie Jacobsen below.

Statement from Elder Carrie Allison:

"I am Carrie Allison an Elder from the Upper Similkameen Indian Band, and I am 90 years old. I have lived in the Similkameen Valley for over 70 years. I was married to Slim Allison for 53 years (passed 2002) and my son is Councillor Michael Allison. I was born in Merritt BC, and I went to the Kamloops Residential School when I was 8 years old for 3 years, and I am one of the survivors.

I am very disappointed in what has happened to Saint Ann's Church. The church was established Circa 1908 and was a historical landmark for all who travelled through the Similkameen Valley. There have been many happy and joyful times with marriages from all the over the world in that church, and for the couple that were to marry there next week, I am devastated.

The church meant so much to all of us, especially our ancestors. Our ancestors had to go to Penticton on horse and wagon to haul the lumber to build that church and would walk for miles to come to church rain or shine because it meant so much to them. When all the people that were taking care of the church had passed away, somebody had to take over, so I did. I think of all our ancestors that helped to build Saint Ann's looking over us and watching all their hard work and the place they cherished, burn to the ground.

To whoever destroyed Saint Ann's church; you must have no feelings or respect for elders or ancestors. A lot of us suffered, but this is not how we do things, and this is not our way. It makes me so sick, sad, and I can only hope I do not know you. I feel sorry for you, and I hope you're satisfied. When your hurt turns to rage it is not healthy for you or your community." ~ Carrie Allison

Statement from Chief Bonnie Jacobsen:

"This past weekend our community and the entire Okanagan Similkameen suffered a huge loss, one that can never be replaced. Our little white church on the hill was loved by many and admired by those who passed by on their way through this valley. There are still many members of USIB that follow the Catholic and Christian faiths who are grieving after these events. Saint Ann's church was built Circa 1908 and holds many different meanings to this community, whether it be weddings, baptisms, sermons, etc. it was a beautiful church and historical landmark that is now gone. While I understand the hurt and anger following the recent discoveries at several residential schools across Canada, I don't believe this is the way, this is not our way, as violence and destruction are never the answer, and we don't condone this.

As always, we are resilient people, and our community has and will continue to join hands together after this tragedy and we will come out stronger despite these events." ~ Chief Bonnie Jacobsen

We want to thank our community members and the Hedley Fire Department for rushing to help try to save Saint Ann's, we are forever grateful to your dedication to this community.

Out of respect for our people, please refrain from contacting anyone in the Upper Similkameen while we all take the time to heal from this invasion and loss to our community.

Respectfully,
USIB Chief & Council