

WILDFIRES CONTINUE TO THREATEN CALIFORNIA MONASTERIES



With at least two months left in fire season, 4 million acres have already burned across the state of California, with fires continuing to grow in northern California, as well as Oregon and Washington, placing several Orthodox monasteries, churches, and parishioners' homes at risk.

According to a new update from His Eminence Archbishop Benjamin of San Francisco (OCA), several Orthodox families have tragically lost their homes to the fires. His Eminence notes a special concern for Holy Assumption Monastery in Calistoga, California in the northern part of the Napa Valley, whose sisters were evacuated on Sunday evening, taking refuge at the OCA's Monastery of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco in Manton, California, 3 hours to the northeast.

Holy Assumption is the oldest Orthodox women's monastery in the Western Hemisphere, Abp. Benjamin writes, having been established by refugees from China.

As of yesterday, the fire had not yet entered the city of Calistoga itself, but high winds and high temperatures place the monastery at risk.

His Eminence also thanks all those who donated to help the suffering in southern Oregon. Donations for fire relief may be sent to:

Diocese of the West
attn: Fire Relief
806 Talent Ave.
Talent, OR 97540

Late last month, OrthoChristian reported on the situation with St. Herman's Monastery in Platina, California, which is also under threat by the wildfires. Yesterday, the brotherhood reported to OrthoChristian that the fire had jumped the containment line and was now in the gorge about 8 miles from the monastery.

The Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco also issued a press release yesterday, noting that it is aware of 19 families who have faced significant loss as a result of the fires in California, Oregon, and Washington.

Thanks to donations from the faithful across the country and the National Philoptochos organization, the Metropolis has been able to provide assistance to parishioners from several parishes who have been affected by the fires, including one parish from the Antiochian Archdiocese.

"Words cannot describe the extensiveness of the destruction that has occurred on the west coast. There are so many people who are suffering and, while we are doing our best to support the needs of those families whose homes have been destroyed, there is nothing we can do to adequately soothe their wounded hearts, as they see their homes and belongings diminished to ashes," stated His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco. "Our prayers continue to be uplifted to God for His mercy and peace, and for the strength of the firefighters whose heroism in the face of danger cannot be adequately recognized and honored."

The Metropolis also draws attention to Calistoga, where the 11-acre Macedonian Park has been virtually destroyed by fire, except for St. Demetrios Chapel, "which has been miraculously spared from destruction." The statement also notes the plight of the sisters of Holy Assumption Monastery.

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