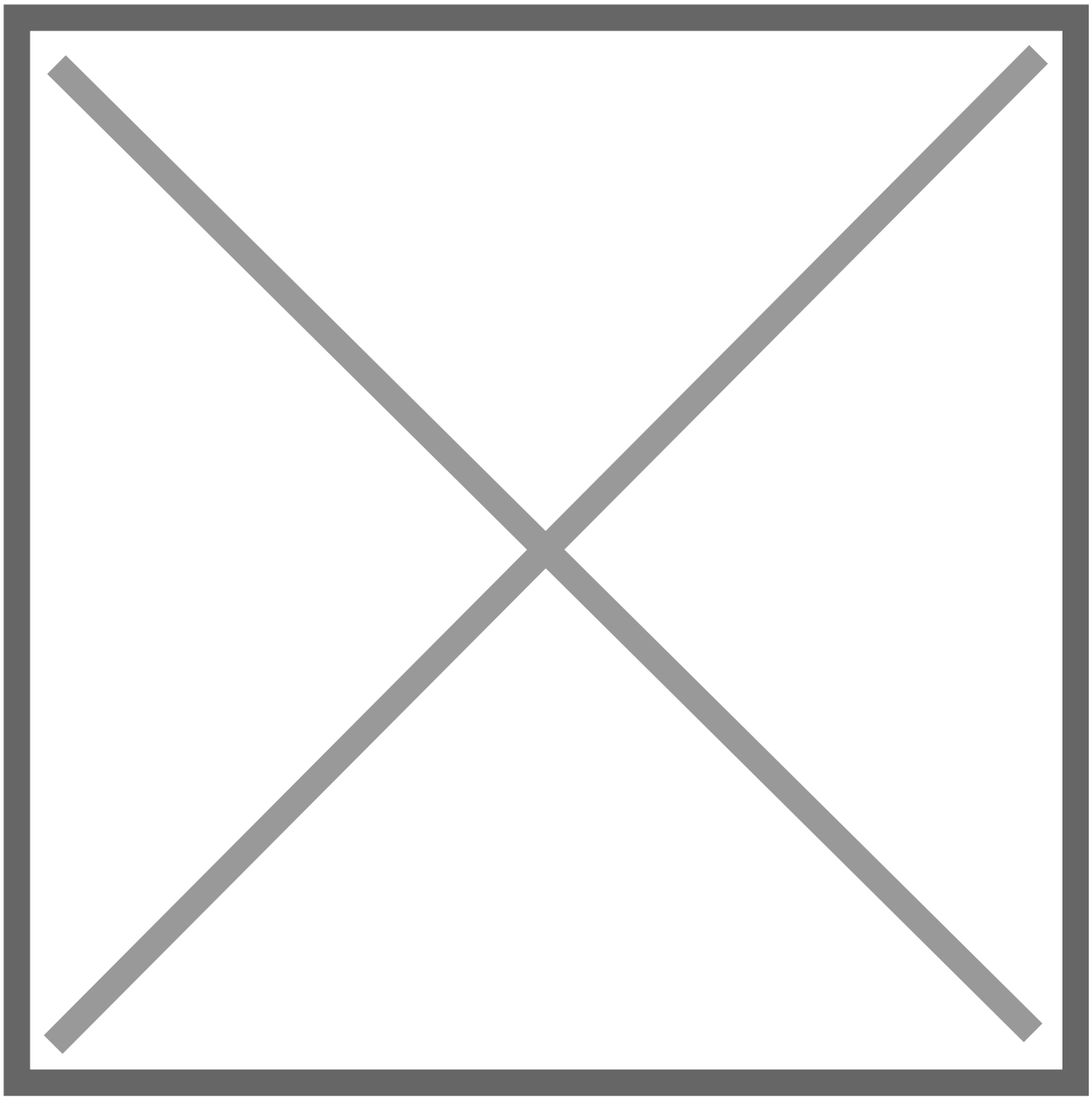
News



Historic St. Ann's Catholic Church on the Hedley Native Reserve of the Upper Similkameen Band was destroyed by fire June 26, 2021. (CNS photo/Benjamin Madison, Victoria Daily)

The B.C. Catholic Staff

View Author Profile



Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vancouver, British Colombia — June 29, 2021

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Two more Catholic churches on First Nations land have been destroyed by fire, while fire damaged an Anglican church on First Nations land in northern British Columbia. Police are calling all the blazes "suspicious."

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said officers were investigating June 26 fires that destroyed the century-old St. Ann's Catholic Church on the Hedley Native Reserve of the Upper Similkameen Indian Band and Our Lady of Lourdes Church on the Chopaka Native Reserve of the Lower Similkameen Indian Band, near Osoyoos.

Also June 26, a fire damaged the century-old St. Paul's Anglican Church on Gitwangak First Nations land, between Terrace and New Hazelton. The blaze was extinguished before it could destroy the church.

The fires bring to five the number of churches on Indigenous land that have been destroyed or damaged by suspicious blazes within a week.

On June 21, fires reduced to rubble two historic Catholic churches on First Nations lands in the Okanagan area.

Those fires, which police consider suspicious, destroyed Sacred Heart Mission Church on Penticton Indian Band land and St. Gregory Mission Church on Osoyoos Indian Band land.

The latest fires occurred within an hour of each other, with Princeton RCMP receiving a call at 3:52 a.m. about the St. Ann's fire and Keremeos RCMP being notified of the Chopaka fire at 4:45 a.m.

Advertisement

Police said the Chopaka fire spread to nearby brush but was quickly put out by BC Wildfire crews before it could spread.

Sgt. Jason Bayda of the Penticton South Okanagan RCMP said police are treating both fires as suspicious and "are looking to determine any possible connection to the church fires" June 21.

"The investigations into the previous fires and these two new fires are ongoing with no arrests or charges," said Bayda.

Lower Similkameen Indian Band Chief Keith Crow told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. that many in the community were members at the church and were very upset.

"I'm angry," he told CBC. "I don't see any positive coming from this, and it's going to be tough."