



Holden Village Board shares updates and collective thanks
Calls on community to face challenges together

February 6, 2026

Dear Holden Village,

As we all know and appreciate, Holden Village, grounded in the love of Christ, is a place of deep commitments, shared meaning, and values of courage, faith, and community. The Board of Holden Village serves as collective stewards of those commitments and values and takes seriously the charge that follows from them. It is from that deep place of love and support of Holden that we offer two expressions: our collective thanks and some updates.

First, we are deeply grateful for your prayers, for your financial support in gifts and increases in annual commitments, for your offerings of housing and employment leads for evacuated and unemployed staff. We are especially grateful for your outpouring of support for our new Executive Directors who have been in office for only five full months and have faced significant challenges unseen by most of their predecessors. We the Board, together with the EDs, appreciate that support and your prayers at a time like this. We are grateful as well for the relationships with USFS, the Chelan County Sheriff's Office, and Rio Tinto in this devastating emergency.

However, as you know, the natural disaster has been complicated by the deeply disturbing news of expressed lack of confidence in the EDs in the form of three individuals who took it upon themselves to enter the Village shortly before Christmas—with no prior announcement or permission—to conduct repairs. While these individuals were well meaning and had the best of intentions, the impact of their actions have concerned us deeply, because they have jeopardized the relationships the EDs and Board have built with Rio Tinto, with the USFS, and with the Chelan County Sheriff's Office over many years. Holden depends on these relationships for its survival.

We have since learned that before this group left, one of them took an excavator from our Rio Tinto neighbors without their consent, and used it to clear debris and attempt unauthorized repairs to FSR 8301. The USFS has opened an inquiry into these actions. This behavior is not in keeping with our values as a village and our commitment to be a place set apart from the world, sometimes in tension with the world's dominant values. Nor is it in keeping with our tradition of support for our EDs. As you have seen from their ongoing communications, Bjørn and Elise have led with courage, putting human life first, exercising uncommonly good

judgment, and acting with compassion for staff to see that they receive the best possible care. Their deep devotion to Holden in the midst of many personal disappointments is evidence of their strong faith in God and in Holden's mission and vision.

Holden has never shied away from challenge or controversy, but our strength has been to face challenges together as Holden Village. We are very familiar with Holden's early pioneering spirit, which has persisted to some extent for many of us into the present day. Collective and individual initiative, unilateral and spontaneous action to address problems, and deeds of derring-do are legendary at Holden, and some of them were doubtless critical to Holden's flourishing in the early years. We are also familiar with and heartily support the fierce debate that we villagers engage in on every topic. It is therefore not surprising, though it is deeply troubling, that in their time of greatest stress some wrote directly to the EDs or on social media scolding them for failing to lead and failing to be grateful to the interlopers. We do not believe that such actions are well-founded, constructive, or reflective of Holden values.

Holden is not merely a place in the Railroad Creek Valley. Holden has always been more than that. Our values make us who we are and our hope is that we can collectively support each other, (including those who have taken these actions) with the accountability that is part of our Lutheran Christian identity. It is our responsibility as your Board, to make sure that we hold those values in tension with the way the world so often operates.

While we can disagree with actions that any of us perform, whether in leadership or otherwise, it is imperative that we act with collective good will in working through difficult times and especially in supporting the EDs and the Board as we navigate unprecedented challenges to Holden's future. Your feedback and generosity of spirit and your steadfast support of Holden's leadership in these critical times are vital to us and we ask you to direct that energy to us, and not the EDs at this time. Indeed, the Board welcomes the expression by the community of concerns and constructively critical comments addressed directly to the President of the Board at markschwahn@holdenboard.org. It does *not* welcome complaints, criticisms, and accusations posted pointlessly on social media sites instead of being directed more narrowly to pertinent agencies or parties like the Board.

The Board completed a multi-year approach to making sure Holden will have processes and procedures that streamline our work. We have created a Risk Management Committee to counsel the EDs about which behaviors they should limit or prohibit. We now have an HR unit that formulates and oversees policies to keep both staff and villagers safe. And instead of leaving fund-raising primarily to divine providence, we now have a robust Advancement Staff and an ED whose major professional experience is in that area.

In sum, Holden has grown into the twenty-first century that is filled with compliance issues, with liability concerns, and above all with a salutary emphasis on public health and safety. Common prudence demands all of this, and our Christian identity demands that we strengthen our beloved community in its love and care for one another and for the world.

Thanks again to all of you for your love and care for Holden Village.

The Holden Village Board