

BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012



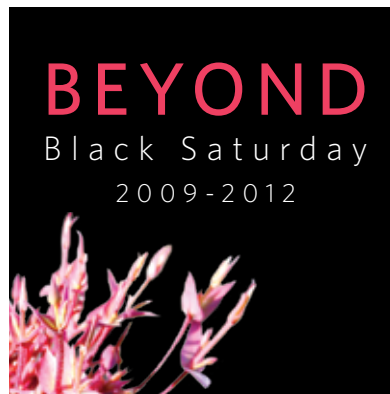
A REPORT PREPARED ON BEHALF OF
THE ARCHBISHOP'S CHARITABLE FUND BUSHFIRE APPEAL
BY THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE
AND CATHOLICCARE MELBOURNE



Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.'



PHOTO COURTESY OF FR GREG BOURKE



This report describes how the generosity of Catholics worldwide was turned into immediate and long term assistance for communities recovering from the Black Saturday Bushfires of February 2009 in the Archdiocese of Melbourne and the Dioceses of Sandhurst and Sale.



Catholic Education Office
Archdiocese of Melbourne

The Archbishop's CHARITABLE FUND



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE



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Some material in this document is extracted from *Kairos Catholic Journal*, the official journal of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne; *The Catholic Recovery Response*, by Professor Ruth Webber and Dr Kate Jones of Australian Catholic University; annual reports and newsletters of Victorian Catholic Social Services, and internal documents, reports and conversations with staff in Melbourne, Gippsland and Sandhurst Bushfire Recovery programs.

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A note on terminology

Centacare Catholic Family Services Melbourne changed their name to CatholicCare in April 2011. The new name CatholicCare is used throughout this report. Services in the Dioceses of Sale and Sandhurst are known by slightly different names: Centacare Gippsland, in the Diocese of Sale and CentaCare Sandhurst, in the Diocese of Sandhurst.

CONTENTS

IN SUMMARY	4
A MESSAGE FROM ARCHBISHOP DENIS HART	5
A MESSAGE FROM SIR JAMES GOBBO	6
THE DISASTER	7
THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE	10
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE	13
▪ THE INITIAL RESPONSE TEAM	14
▪ THE RESPONSE OF THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY	15
▪ 2009 MILESTONES	18
▪ BUSHFIRE RECOVERY CHAPLAINCY	19
▪ COMMEMORATIONS AND PRAYERS	22
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY'S RECOVERY STRATEGY	25
▪ A COMMUNITY LED RECOVERY	29
▪ BUSHFIRE RECOVERY PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES	30
▪ BUSHFIRE RECOVERY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS	32
▪ MEDIATION AND COMMUNITY LIAISON	32
▪ ECOTHERAPY	32
▪ SOCIAL GATHERINGS, OUTINGS AND GETAWAYS	33
▪ ART THERAPY	36
▪ THE COMMUNITY ON GROUND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM – A CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP	41
WISDOM OF THE FIRE	44
FINANCIAL REPORT	46
THANK YOU TO DONORS, VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF	48
AN EPIPHANY OF DEER	49

IN SUMMARY

The Black Saturday Bushfires burnt across Victoria on and around Saturday 7 February 2009. The loss of life and the extent of devastation was horrific. As the bushfires raged and reports came in Catholics across Australia and throughout the globe offered fervent prayers for the victims. They then began to send money to the Archbishop of Melbourne, the Most Reverend Denis J. Hart, to help those suffering in the aftermath of the bushfires.

Immediately the Archdiocese marshalled its resources to provide a presence in the region. A Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy Committee was set up to oversee the influx of volunteers and facilitate regular and wide reaching reports on the disaster and the recovery effort. It also collaborated with the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne to support affected schools and with the Archbishop's Office for Evangelisation to develop a sensitive liturgy for the time. A Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy, dedicated to enhance pastoral activities in the most devastated parishes, commenced on 18 February 2009. An Inter-Agency Committee was also established with representatives from the members of Catholic Social Services Victoria to devise, implement and review the best service response to support the shattered communities.

Two days after Black Saturday, Archbishop Hart established the Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal. The intention from the beginning was to provide *long term* recovery assistance to bushfire survivors. Assistance that would

continue to support individuals and rebuild communities long after emergency response services had left. Archbishop Hart appointed Sir James Gobbo to chair the committee which allocated these donations to services and projects for communities rebuilding after the deadliest firestorm in Australia's European history.

Almost \$4 million was donated. This substantial amount funded some early activities of the Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy Committee, three significant Bushfire Recovery Services and a range of community projects for over three years. It also funded an evaluation of these activities by Australian Catholic University, The Catholic Bushfire Recovery Response, presented in 2012. In many cases, these services and projects have left communities in better shape than they were before the catastrophe.

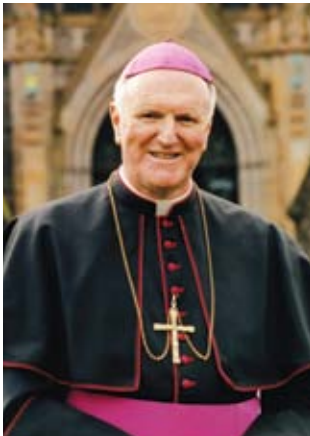
The defining features of these Bushfire Recovery Services and their associated community projects reflect the dignity and diversity of each person and their family, and a respect for all cultures, religious beliefs and personal values. Each service was designed to accommodate the changing needs of communities and arose from discussions, collaborations and partnerships with local residents, groups and organisations to meet the particular needs identified by the communities themselves.

This report describes the services and projects made possible by the generosity of the Australian Catholic community.





A Message from Archbishop Denis Hart



I remember our nation's shock at the horror of the Black Saturday Bushfires. So many died. So many families were devastated. So many communities were torn apart. Survivors suffered the loss of loved ones, their homes and their livelihoods. Amidst the trauma, uncertainty and grief, Victorians gathered in solidarity with communities caught in the inferno's path.

During those days I witnessed the greatness of the human spirit—the selfless courage of fire fighters, police and emergency workers. Our Victorian community was joined through prayer and practical assistance by Australians across the country, as well as people and organisations from around the globe. People gave on a scale I have not experienced before.

Despite feeling overwhelmed and powerless in the presence of such incomprehensible tragedy, I saw people stream to help, offering all that they could. I saw the resilience and stubborn resolve of survivors, and the love that resides in families and communities. I saw people who had lost everything comfort others, and I saw hope still shining in the hearts of children.

In a world baptised by fire, the earth burnt black, charred trees stretched and leafless, it was this resilience, love and hope that reminded us of the promise of rebirth in the resurrected Christ.

Archbishop Denis J. Hart DD

Archbishop of Melbourne



BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012

A Message from Sir James Gobbo



PHOTO COURTESY OF SIR JAMES GOBBO

Australian Catholics donated nearly \$4 million to the Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal to help survivors of Australia's worst bushfires. As the donations began to flow in, Archbishop Denis Hart approached me to chair the Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal Committee. As chair of that committee I am privileged to have managed the distribution of these donations to those whose lives were changed so irrevocably on Saturday 7 February 2009.

It is an immense responsibility to honour this gift from the Catholic community - a gift that has made so much possible. These donations permitted the immediate establishment of a Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy and financial assistance for bushfire survivors issued through the St Vincent de Paul Society, Catholic parishes and schools. They funded an entirely new service: CatholicCare's Bushfire Community Recovery Service, located where the bushfires were most intense and the loss of life the greatest. This generosity also supported two Bushfire Recovery Teams integrated into existing Catholic services in the Dioceses of Sandhurst and Sale.

Many more projects were made possible by these donations. This report provides only a brief glimpse into the remarkable achievement of the Archdiocese, CatholicCare, St Vincent de Paul Society, the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne, the teachers, families and students of Catholic schools, and the priests and parishioners across the nation who came to aid the survivors of Black Saturday.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Gobbo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" and the last name "Gobbo" clearly legible.

The Honourable Sir James Gobbo A.C. C.V.O. QC.

Chair of the Archbishop's Charitable Bushfire Appeal Committee

Right: Bushfire burns through a forest on the outskirts of Labertouche, 90 kilometres east of Melbourne, on 7 February 2009.

THE DISASTER



*Saturday 7 February 2009 was surreal—
oppressively hot, eerie, devoid of all life.
It unfolded into a nightmare of unimaginable destruction;
a day seared into the hearts of all.*

MARY ANNE VON STRUPPI, BUSHFIRE SURVIVOR
(KAIROS CATHOLIC JOURNAL, MARCH 2010)



BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012



We went through ten years of drought so we knew fire was our most likely disaster, yet we were perilously unprepared. We allowed our population to increase without understanding the threat of fire. We became complacent from doing evacuation drills without a fire.

KINGLAKE, BUSHFIRE SURVIVOR (2009)

The Black Saturday Bushfires burnt across Victoria on and around Saturday 7 February 2009. In the weeks before the bushfires the state was tinder dry. Towns across the region registered their highest temperatures since records began in 1859. These fires occurred in weather regarded as the worst bushfire weather ever, during a drought which desiccated eastern Australia before breaking in the summer of 2011.

From Friday 6 February to the evening of Sunday 8 February, the Bureau of Meteorology issued 205 fire weather announcements. On Saturday 7 February dry gale-force, north to north-westerly winds blew a pool of extreme heat throughout Victoria. High temperatures seared the state; Melbourne reached a record 46.4°C. The exceptional heat, low humidity, high wind speed and dry forests and grasslands produced dangerous conditions early in the day. Winds

averaged 40-60 kilometres per hour. Mount Gellibrand Automatic Weather Station recorded winds of 90 kilometres with gusts up to 115 kilometres per hour.

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) deployed a total of 12,680 fire fighters across the state. At 12.30pm winds felled power lines in Kilmore East, sparking a bushfire that generated extensive pyrocumulus clouds and became the deadliest firestorm in Australia's European history.

The majority of the bushfires were ignited by fallen or clashing power lines, lightning, cigarette butts or sparks from power tools. Some were lit deliberately. The CFA responded to 1,386 fire incidents that day, 316 were in grass, scrub or forest. The CFA estimates that 47

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, left, hugs an unidentified person at Wandong, north of Melbourne, 15 February 2009.

Firefighters work to extinguish a wildfire on the outskirts of Labertouche, 90 kilometres east of Melbourne, 7 February 2009.



PHOTO BY CNS/JULIAN SMITH, REUTERS

THE DISASTER



PHOTO BY EMMY SILVIUS

bushfires could have become what it categorises as 'major fires', but on the day only 15 caused major problems.

Most fire activity occurred between midday and 7.00pm on Black Saturday. By early Sunday a cooler south-westerly wind flowed through the state and the weather event was essentially over. But residents in the bushfire zones had lived with the threat of fire for four weeks before 7 February, and would for another two weeks until weather helped extinguish the bushfires. The Black Saturday Bushfires are still considered one of the worst bushfire events in the world, worse than those of Black Friday in 1939, and Ash Wednesday in 1983, which burnt across South Australia and Victoria.

The Black Saturday Bushfires resulted in Australia's largest ever loss from fire:

- 173 people died, an estimated 7,562 people were displaced
- 414 people were injured directly by the bushfires
- 109 towns and 33 communities were devastated
- Over 2,400 properties were destroyed, 1,400 damaged and 430,000 hectares were burnt
- Over 55 businesses and 3,500 agricultural facilities were ruined and the electricity supply was disrupted to 60,000 households
- 70 national parks and reserves, 950 local parks, 467 cultural sights and over 200 historic places were damaged

The map (below) indicates the devastating loss of life caused by the bushfires. Each number represents a precious life and the thousands of family and friends impacted by each horrendous tragedy.

Map indicates the loss of life caused by the Black Saturday bushfires, February 2009.



PHOTO BY CNS/MICK TSIKAS, REUTERS



THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

A year ago, one of Australia's most significant disasters led to our greatest collective act of generosity. Our horror as thousands of people lost family members, friends, neighbours, homes, pets, possessions and community infrastructure to the bushfires that swept through Victoria, was quickly transformed into unprecedented generosity and action.

PAT MCNAMARA, CHAIRMAN, VICTORIAN BUSHFIRE APPEAL FUND (*THE AGE*, FEBRUARY 6, 2010)

A Country Fire Authority member carries his 5-year-old daughter in the fire-ravaged town of Kinglake, 9 February 2009.



BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012



PHOTO BY CNS/CRAIG BORROW, REUTERS

Emergency workers, including members of a Disaster Victim Identification Team, work at the site of a destroyed house in Steels Creek, about 48 kilometres northeast of Melbourne, 11 February 2009.

On Black Saturday, 25,000 Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers and fire fighters from across Australia, Canada and New Zealand stood beside local farmers and forest industry brigades to quell the blazes. The Australian Federal Parliament was suspended, the Australian Government Disaster Response Plan was activated and Prime Minister Rudd established the Commonwealth Victorian Bushfires Ministerial Taskforce.

At the Integrated Emergency Control Centre in Melbourne, The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and the CFA worked unceasingly beside fellow members of the Network Emergency Organisation - Parks Victoria, the Department of Primary Industry, VicForests, Melbourne Water, the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Bureau

of Meteorology. Other Victorian agencies involved on that day were State Emergency Services (SES), Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria.

This fire fighting corps was boosted by SES members from across the country, the Australian Defence Force, the Federal Police and three Burned Area Emergency Response Teams from the United States of America. Thirty-four aircraft from the state fleet and 23 federal tactical aircraft assisted while the four DSE Erickson aircrews dumped water on the flames. DSE established base camps and staging areas near many of the severe fires at Woori Yallock, Churchill, Healesville, Wesburn and Corryong. The largest, in Alexandra, accommodated up to 550 day and night shift fire fighters and fed more than 1,000 people at each meal.



BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012

Municipal relief centres provided refuge and distributed the food, clothing and bedding which began to pour in. Many sought accommodation in spare rooms, caravans and tents. Access to drinking water was gained through temporary standpipes and community water tanks. Telecommunications organisations supplied free or reduced cost phones. Urgent repairs to power and telecommunication networks, septic tanks and unstable structures took time. Many did not have access to the internet, others were traumatised and unable to absorb information. The fire itself scattered residents as they fled the flames, making the delivery of relief and messages difficult.

The humanitarian response was rapid and enormous. There were many financial appeals. The largest was the Red Cross Victorian Bushfire Appeal, launched in partnership with the Victorian and Australian governments, which received an unprecedented \$378 million in donations - the largest single charitable appeal in Australia's history. The Lions Club fed stock and built fences. The Country Women's Association made meals. The Salvation Army, the Victorian Council of Churches and many Church organisations offered material and financial aid. St John's Ambulance administered first aid, public hospitals cared for over 800 people and the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine established a temporary mortuary at Southbank in Melbourne where the remains of the 164 people admitted were all identified.

On 8 February the State and Federal governments, in partnership with the Australian Red Cross established the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund (VBAF).

On 10 February the Federal and State governments established the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority, chaired by Christine Nixon, to coordinate the rebuilding program. This closed in June 2011 and was replaced by the Fire Recovery Unit which continues to coordinate government responses to the bushfires.

On 11 February the State Government opened the Victorian Bushfire Accommodation Donation Line. Two days later the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service offered support and information to survivors. Catholic agencies across the state provided professional staff to this service.

On 16 February the State Government established the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission to investigate the causes and responses to the bushfires. In 2010 the Royal Commission reported on fifteen areas devastated by the bushfires and identified eleven other unexamined significant fires.

Eleven days after Black Saturday, on 18 February, the Department of Human Services (DHS) established Community Service Hubs near the worst affected areas to help people get government assistance packages. On 13 March the DHS Bushfire Recovery Services Unit began coordinating all the elements of the department's response to the bushfires.

Right: About 1400 attended the Mass for Bushfire Victims held at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, on 12 February 2009.

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE

It's critical to be there, to provide practical help and listen at the same time. People want a visible presence, to know the Church is walking beside them even when their local church is burnt down.

FR BOURKE, BUSHFIRE RECOVERY CHAPLAIN
(KAIROS CATHOLIC JOURNAL, MARCH 2009)



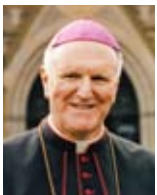
BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012

THE INITIAL RESPONSE TEAM

These key players across the Catholic Church established mechanisms to manage donations, visited communities to discover what was needed, formulated a response and put it into action.



The Most Reverend Denis J. Hart, Archbishop of Melbourne, established the Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal, appointed Sir James Gobbo to chair the Bushfire Appeal Committee and committed the Archdiocese to the long term recovery of the bushfire communities.



Hon. Sir James Gobbo A.C. C.V.O. QC, chaired the Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal Committee.



Bishop Les Tomlinson, Vicar General of the Melbourne Archdiocese, member of the Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal Committee.



Francis Moore, Business Manager of the Melbourne Archdiocese, chaired the Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy Committee which coordinated the early activities, collaborations and communications of the Archdiocese's response to the bushfires.



Denis Fitzgerald, Executive Director of Catholic Social Services Victoria, chaired the Inter-Agency Group which collaborated on the initial Catholic Services' response to the bushfires, activated a rapid needs analysis and engaged Australian Catholic University to evaluate the Catholic response to the bushfire disaster.



Fr Greg Bourke, Jerome Santamaria and Fr Kevin Goode, formed the Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy which consulted and supported parishes, made initial assessments of service gaps and acted as liaison between the Church and other agencies.



Richard Stone, Board Member of CatholicCare and former Board Member of Australian Red Cross, helped animate and shape the initial response to the bushfires.



Fr Joe Caddy, CEO of CatholicCare, proposed the appointment of the Bushfire Chaplaincy, instigated CatholicCare's service response and appointed Janet Cribbes to establish and manage the Bushfire Recovery Service in the Melbourne Archdiocese.



Janet Cribbes, Manager of CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service, recommended a Community Led Recovery Strategy and established and managed CatholicCare's service for the areas covered by the Melbourne Archdiocese. Helen Goodman also acted in this role from April to October 2011.



Paul Fogarty, Director of CentaCare Sandhurst, appointed and managed the Bushfire Recovery Team in the Diocese of Sandhurst.



Jamie Edwards, Director of Centacare Gippsland, managed the Bushfire Recovery Team in the Diocese of Sale. He took over from **Arda Tymenson**, who appointed and established the team before leaving the position in August 2009.



Professor Ruth Webber, Director of Quality of Life and Social Justice Research Centre at Australian Catholic University, performed a three-year study of the Community Led Recovery Strategy with her assistant **Dr Kate Jones**.

THE RESPONSE OF THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

The Bendigo and Redesdale fires raged in the Diocese of Sandhurst, and the Bunyip, Delburn and Churchill fires burnt across the Diocese of Sale. In the Melbourne Archdiocese the Kilmore East Fire, in the north of Melbourne, met the Murrindindi Fire from the north-east and ravaged the shires of Mitchell, Murrindindi, Nillumbik and Yarra Ranges, and the City of Whittlesea. In Murrindindi it burnt through Kinglake, Flowerdale, Marysville, Buxton, Castella, Glenburn, Kinglake West, Narbethong, Pheasant Creek and Taggerty, razing to the ground St Mary's Church, Kinglake and Our Lady of Snows in Marysville. While there were Catholic welfare services already located in Sandhurst and Gippsland, there was no Catholic welfare service available to those in the most devastated region north of Melbourne.

The response of Catholic schools, parishes, services and individuals was immediate. Although no Catholic schools or personnel were lost, the impact of the bushfires on students, staff and families was significant. Schools helped schools. They offered places for shelter, space to store donated goods, rooms to provide counselling services, and staff tracked the whereabouts of pupils and families. St Mary's Primary School in Whittlesea was inundated with help from other schools both in Melbourne and interstate. It became an emergency relief centre storing and distributing donated goods. The Presentation Sisters in their schools throughout Australia made donations. Sacred Heart School in Yea received a substantial amount with which St Vincent de Paul Diamond Creek bought doonas, underlays, blankets, pillows and linen.

The Catholic Education Office in Melbourne (CEOM) provided immediate financial aid to bushfire families by waiving school fees and helping with uniform purchase. Counselling and pastoral care for school personnel and



Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon with Vinnies staff and volunteers at Vinnies Disaster Appeal Warehouse in Rowville, 2009.

PHOTO BY
GEORGIA
METAXAS

families was also made available. The presbytery of Sacred Heart in Yea was refurbished to offer counselling and support to staff and students from the area. Archbishop Denis Hart, Mr Stephen Elder, the Director of Catholic Education, and Francis Moore, Business Manager of the Melbourne Archdiocese, visited schools affected by the bushfires, and regional CEOM managers kept regular contact to help schools seek out assistance related to their specific needs.

During the recovery, schools raised money, donated goods and administered donated goods to bushfire survivors. At Mary MacKillop Catholic Regional College in Leongatha, students wore yellow, sold slices, sausages and soft drink, and rattled tins for gold coins to raise \$2,362.

A call went out for volunteers throughout the parishes and religious orders. 380 people volunteered to assist with a range of tasks including sorting donated goods and providing emotional support and friendship to bushfire survivors. Some were coordinated by CatholicCare Melbourne and others were referred to the St Vincent de Paul Society.

One of the beacons of hope that shone in this tragedy was the Australian Catholic community's support. Schools, parishes and families were among those keen to assist. Relief and assistance agencies were flooded with offers of help.

DENIS FITZGERALD, CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES VICTORIA
(KAIROS CATHOLIC JOURNAL, FEBRUARY 2009)

BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012



Above left and right: One of hundreds of fundraising initiatives organised by Catholic parishes and schools. This one was organised by parishioners of St Anthony's Glen Huntly, 2009.

Parishioners across Australia banded together to help. St Mary's Parish Whittlesea Bushfire Relief, established by Fr Maurice Cooney, raised more than \$100,000 and stored six large containers of food, clothes and other goods for bushfire survivors. In Gladstone, Queensland, a parishioner gathered friends to make quilts for parishioners in Diamond Creek. Church buildings and facilities were made available across the state. The Sandhurst Diocese offered its Ovens River Chalet to survivors for a holiday. Parishioners from Mitcham chopped wood, cleared gardens and organised a barbeque for Strathewen survivors.

The St Vincent de Paul Society launched the Victorian Disaster Appeal on 9 February 2009. They also received funding from the Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal through which they provided immediate emergency relief utilising the 45 Vinnies Centres in the bushfire zones.

From February 2009, CatholicCare Melbourne offered a number of counsellors to work at community relief centres and the Department of Human Services Bushfire Case Management Service. Sister Sue McGovern, a Josephite from South Australia, and Sister Margaret Ryan from the Sisters of Mercy, the pastoral associate at Sacred Heart Church, Diamond Creek and St Mary's Kinglake, arrived in the first days after the fire to care for bushfire survivors and to coordinate volunteers. In June, CatholicCare established the Kinglake House of Welcome above the Harvest Café, where Sisters Ryan and McGovern began

their work. Sr Margaret coordinated the volunteer effort and later joined the CatholicCare team. This was the first CatholicCare presence in the most devastated bushfire zone.

In the days and weeks following the Black Saturday Bushfires, Catholics throughout Australia donated almost \$4 million to the Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal. The Appeal was established on 9 February 2009 to provide immediate emergency assistance and most importantly to provide *long term* recovery initiatives that would continue long after emergency services had departed. Donations funded a Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy, three significant Bushfire Recovery Services and a broad range of community recovery projects.

Anxious to provide an immediate presence in the regions, the Archdiocese marshalled its resources to establish a Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy to coordinate its initial activities. This included the appointment of a Bushfire Recovery Chaplain, the management of volunteers and regular reporting on the recovery effort through *Kairos Catholic Journal* and the newsletter, *Recovery*. The Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy Committee also oversaw the development of a sensitive liturgy that acknowledged the poignancy of the time. In addition, it arranged venues that could host counselling sessions and meetings to share information.

Simultaneously, Denis Fitzgerald, Director of Catholic Social Services Victoria established an inter-agency committee of representatives from CatholicCare, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services, Jesuit Social Services, MacKillop Family Services and the St Vincent de Paul Society. This committee's



This is an opportunity to create a new paradigm for the welfare service in the area.

FERGUS RYAN, AO,
ARCHBISHOP'S BUSHFIRE
APPEAL COMMITTEE (2009)



Principal of St Mary's Catholic Primary School in Whittlesea, Kevin Burke, and six containers of food, clothes and other goods for the bushfire victims, 2009.

PHOTO BY LES O'Rourke

role was to identify the immediate and long term welfare needs of those caught in the bushfires and implement a community development program which was integrated into the local communities and would operate for 2-3 years. The guiding objective of this program was to leave communities in better shape than they were before the catastrophe.

Early in its life the Inter-Agency Committee agreed that CatholicCare Melbourne, and the regional services in Gippsland and Sandhurst would take the lead in implementing the disaster recovery response. Expert advisors including clinical psychologist, Fr Peter Hosking SJ, program development adviser, Toby O'Connor, along with CSSV Member Support and Projects Coordinator, Terry O'Shannassy and the Director of Centacare Gippsland, Arda Tymensen, were then invited into this group. The Committee appointed Janet Cribbes to perform a rapid needs analysis and recommend the service model to be funded through the Archbishop's Bushfire Appeal. Professor Ruth Webber, Director of Quality of Life and Social Justice Research Centre at Australian Catholic University, was later engaged to undertake a three-year study of the Catholic response to the bushfires so the Church would be better prepared in the future. This report, *The Catholic Bushfire Recovery Response*, presented in 2012, provides critical information to equip the Catholic Church to respond more effectively to future catastrophes.

In March, Janet Cribbes presented *The Victorian Bushfire Community Recovery Response Report* recommending a range

of services based on a Community Led Recovery model. She proposed the establishment of a Bushfire Community Recovery Service to serve the five municipalities affected by the fire. The service was based in the Murrindindi region, the worst affected area. Janet Cribbes also recommended the integration of Bushfire Recovery Teams into existing services in the Dioceses of Sandhurst and Sale. Due to the long term nature of disaster recovery, these services were to be funded for three years.

The Bushfire Recovery Teams; CentaCare Sandhurst and Centacare Gippsland were quickly established. After extensive consultations with the local community, CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service (BCRS) was opened in Kinglake in August 2009. The Bushfire Recovery Teams in Sandhurst and Gippsland closed in June 2012, but a combination of funds from the Archbishop's Bushfire Appeal and the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund will allow BCRS to operate until December 2013.

BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012



PHOTO BY EMMY SILVIUS

2009 MILESTONES

- 7 February** Municipal Community Relief Centres are established.
- 7 February** Department of Environment and Sustainability (DSE) established base camps and service areas near severe bushfires.
- 7 February** Catholic Social Service workers from CatholicCare Melbourne, Centacare Gippsland and CentaCare Sandhurst began providing support to bushfire survivors.
- 8 February** Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund (VBAF) was launched.
- 9 February** The Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal was launched.
- 9 February** St Vincent de Paul Society Victorian Disaster Appeal was launched.
- 10 February** Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA) was established.
- 11 February** Victorian Bushfire Accommodation Donation Line was opened.
- 11 February** Catholic Education Office waived 2009 school fees and offered additional financial assistance to families in the bushfire zones.
- 13 February** Victorian DHS Bushfire Case Management Service began.
- 16 February** The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission was established.
- 18 February** Department of Human Services (DHS) established the Community Service Hubs.
- 18 February** Fr Greg Bourke was appointed as Bushfire Recovery Chaplain.
- 27 February** The Catholic Social Services Inter-Agency Committee was established.
- 2 March** The Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy Committee was established.
- 5 March** Janet Cribbes was appointed to undertake a rapid needs analysis.
- 9 March** Australian Catholic University was commissioned to evaluate the Catholic response to the disaster.
- 13 March** DHS created the Bushfire Recovery Services Unit.
- 17 March** A Bushfire Grief Counsellor was appointed by Centacare Gippsland.
- 1 April** Janet Cribbes was appointed by CatholicCare to establish and manage the Bushfire Community Recovery Service.
- 16 May** CatholicCare opened Kinglake Hospitality Space at the Harvest Café.
- 1 July** Bushfire Recovery Teams were appointed by CentaCare Sandhurst.
- 1 August** CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service began its recovery work.
- 1 September** The Bushfire Recovery Team was appointed in Centacare Gippsland.



Guy Williams at his Brennan Ave, Steels Creek home which survived the devastating Black Saturday bushfires.

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY CHAPLAINCY

While the fires were still burning, the Archdiocese worked to create a strong presence in the devastated region north of Melbourne. Bishops, priests and workers made frequent visits. Two of these visitors were Fr Joe Caddy, the CEO of CatholicCare, and Richard Stone, a Board Member for CatholicCare. Deeply concerned for the sudden burden placed on parish priests, Fr Caddy proposed that Archbishop Denis Hart institute a Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy for the Melbourne Archdiocese.

On 18 February 2009, the Archbishop appointed Fr Greg Bourke as Bushfire Recovery Chaplain and two weeks later the Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy Committee was established. This Committee coordinated the Archdiocese's immediate response to the bushfires. Its membership included:

- Chair: Francis Moore, Business Manager, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne (CAM)
- Fr Joe Caddy, CEO, CatholicCare
- Fr Greg Bourke, Bushfire Recovery Chaplain
- Jerome Santamaria, Bushfire Recovery Chaplain
- Fr Kevin Goode, Bushfire Recovery Chaplain
- Janet Cribbes, Manager, CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service
- Denis Fitzgerald, Director, Catholic Social Services Victoria

- Jan Elliott, Manager, Eastern Region, Catholic Education Office Melbourne
- Pauline Zappulla, Manager, Northern Region, Catholic Education Office Melbourne
- Tom Carr, Manager, Human Resources, CAM
- Brother Mark O'Connor, Director, Archbishop's Office for Evangelisation, CAM
- James O'Farrell, Director, Communications Office, CAM
- Adrian Klep, Manager, Finance and General Operations, CAM

The Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy Committee assisted with the coordination of volunteers and collaborated with the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne to support affected schools. It also worked with the Archbishop's Office for Evangelisation to develop a sensitive liturgy and prayer card acknowledging the poignancy of the time, and arranged venues from which counselling and information sharing could occur. It participated with Baptist, Anglican and Uniting Churches in the Combined Churches of Whittlesea Shopfront project, which operated as a community relief centre and, through the Archdiocese's Communications Office, established *Recovery*, a newsletter which reported on the recovery effort, fortnightly initially, then monthly for the first year. *Kairos Catholic Journal*, the official journal of the Melbourne Archdiocese, also carried bushfire stories for the two years following the bushfires. Through the Archbishop's Bushfire Fund, the committee provided money for teachers whose families were

BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012

Our Lady of the Snows, Marysville, provides a visual story of the process of recovery:



The original church



... the devastation after the fires



... and now, a demountable provides a place for parishioners to worship together.

PHOTO: ©ST BRIGID'S PARISH, HEALESVILLE FROM THE BOOK VALLEY'S MIST AND MOUNTAINS, ST BRIGID'S PARISH, HEALESVILLE CENTENARY 1999 BY BERNIE MORRISSEY

PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHOLIC CARE

PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHOLIC CARE

affected, or whose properties were damaged, and who required time off work to attend to these issues.

The work of parish priests and principals from the parishes and schools within the bushfire zone was extraordinary. They, along with their staff, provided pastoral support during the emergency response phase and have tirelessly continued to do so in the years since.

Fr Bourke with his assistants Jerome Santamaria, and Fr Kevin Goode made up the Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy team. They gathered together local pastoral associates and priests to ascertain the service needs of the bushfire survivors. They liaised with appropriate officials to ensure clergy could reach bushfire survivors in the cordoned-off zones. Fr Bourke visited parishes initially on a weekly basis, then fortnightly, to discover the particular pastoral needs of each parish. As a result, part time pastoral associates became full time and extra secretarial support was given to priests performing funerals and providing pastoral care to survivors.

Immersed in the communities, Fr Bourke witnessed the realities people faced after the firestorm—dead who are mourned, but not yet buried; injured relatives in far away hospitals; family cars burnt in the fire; plumbing that cannot be connected because pipes have melted; survivors unable to search through their rubble because of the presence of asbestos; mud and ash trampled into makeshift homes of homeless families; frustrated children; spouses divided about what to do; neighbours feeling guilty because their home endured the fires; people blaming one another for the tragedy. What was seen during those days guided CatholicCare's overall response to the bushfires.

Fr Bourke initiated workshops for pastoral associates, priests and school teachers on disaster recovery. These were presented by child and adolescent psychologist, Olivia Keen and Peter Hosking SJ, from Jesuit Social Services. When CatholicCare's Bushfire Community Recovery Service in Kinglake began operation in April 2009, the Bushfire Recovery Chaplaincy receded. Fr Bourke returned to Hoppers Crossing, but continued his work providing in-service training and retreat days for the survivors, parish priests and pastoral associates.

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE

St Mary's Church, Kinglake



BEFORE: St Mary's Church, Kinglake was completely destroyed in the Black Saturday bushfires, parishioners came across the remains of the tabernacle in the burnt rubble.



AFTER: The newly constructed St Mary's Church, Kinglake was officially opened on 28 March 2011.



Fr Grant O'Neill and Archbishop Denis Hart at the newly opened St Mary's Church at Kinglake.

PHOTO BY CNS/RICK RYGCROFT/REUTERS

PHOTO BY PETER BENNETTS

PHOTO BY JEREMY YUEN

Top right (from left): Debbie Edwards, Sr Sue McGovern, Fr Greg Bourke, Julie Nairn, Fr Julian Langridge.

Bottom right: Kim Wilkie, Fr Greg Bourke and Sir James Gobbo at the temporary village in Marysville.



PHOTO BY JAMES O'FARRELL



PHOTO BY JAMES O'FARRELL

'He makes all things beautiful in his time.'

ECCLESIASTES 3:11



BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012



PHOTO COURTESY OF FR JULIAN LANGRIDGE

From left: Christine Karczmarczuk, Bishop Tomlinson, John Karczmarczuk.



PHOTO BY CASAMEN TO PHOTOGRAPHY

Catholics pray for bushfire victims at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, 12 February 2009.

COMMEMORATIONS AND PRAYERS

We believe the power of prayer transcends disaster. God can be found in the stillness of prayer and there he gives us fortitude in the face of devastation. Services, commemorations and vigils across the world brought us together in remembrance of those who died in the Black Saturday Bushfires. These gatherings gave courage to survivors and acknowledged those who came to aid Victorians in the worst bushfires in history. On the following pages are reflections on just some of these services.

People's prayerfulness is invaluable. Just knowing they are held in prayer by those who cannot otherwise support is powerful.

Janet Cribbes, Bushfire Community Recovery Service (August 2009)

Mourners gathered in the Fitzroy Gardens for the ecumenical service.



PHOTO BY PONCH HAWKES

MONDAY 9 FEBRUARY: A MILLION PRAYERS FOR FIRE VICTIMS

Catholic Mission launched a worldwide prayer vigil for the victims and survivors, and the national office of Catholic Mission was inundated with compassionate messages from Catholics in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Pacific and the Americas.

We are an international community of Catholics who help each other in time of need ... our prayers will lift the spirit of the victims.

Martin Teulan, Catholic Mission's National Director

MONDAY 9 FEBRUARY: A SPECIAL MASS WAS OFFERED AT ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL, SYDNEY

Cardinal George Pell extended his deepest condolences on behalf of the Catholic community of Sydney. A message from the Holy Father was relayed:

The Holy Father commends the deceased to the loving mercy of Almighty God. On grieving families and all those suffering from the loss of property and destruction of their land, he invokes divine strength and consolation.

TUESDAY 10 FEBRUARY: COMMEMORATIVE MASS AT ST PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL, MELBOURNE

About 1400 people attended including: Deputy Premier Rob Hulls, Treasurer John Lenders, Shadow Minister Martin Dixon representing the leader of the opposition, Leader of the Nationals, Peter Ryan, James Merlino, Tim Pallas, Shadow Minister Nicholas Kotsiras, the Honourable Christine Campbell, Ms Kirstie Marshall, Ms Danielle Green, Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services.

*When human voices cannot sing and human hearts are breaking,
we bring our grief to you, O God,
who knows our inner aching.*

Lyrics: Shirley Erena Murray

Music: St Columba, Gaelic, arrangement by Percy Jones

SUNDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2009: ECUMENICAL WALK AND SERVICE IN FITZROY GARDENS

Those who attended included the Victorian Governor Prof. David de Kretser and his wife Jan, Melbourne Lord Mayor Robert Doyle, former Governor General Bishop Peter Hollingworth, the General Secretary of the Victorian Council of Churches Maureen Postma, Archbishop Denis Hart and Bishop Monsignor Les Tomlinson.

MONDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2009: ECUMENICAL PRAYER SERVICE IN SACRED HEART CATHEDRAL, BENDIGO

More than 900 attended. Prayers were offered by the Catholic Bishop of Sandhurst Bishop Joseph Grech, the Anglican Bishop of Bendigo Bishop Andrew Curnow, Reverend Kevin Dobson of the Uniting Church, and ministers from other Bendigo churches.

A bowl filled with water was placed at the front of the Cathedral. During the service people came forward and placed petals in the bowl in remembrance of those who died in the bushfires, and of those without home or shelter.

We are people of hope and resurrection ... Together we acknowledge the heartbreak and fear that has come to our doors. Together we gain strength to creep forward ... Help us bear the sorrow ... Be our strength, weep with us as we mourn, celebrate the small victories with us ...

Bishop Andrew Curnow, Bendigo

TUESDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2009: MASS IN ORATORY OF ST FRANCIS XAVIER DEL CARAVITA, ROME

A Mass was held for the victims of the Victorian bushfires in the 400-year-old Oratory of St Francis Xavier del Caravita. The Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney, Bishop Julian Porteous, was the chief celebrant, and Australia's Ambassador to Italy, Amanda Vanstone, and Ambassador to the Holy See, the Hon. Tim Fischer, both read from the scriptures.

With vivid memories of my recent visit to your beautiful country, I assure you of my prayers for the country's well-being and in particular I wish to send my condolences to the grieving individuals and families in Victoria who have lost loved ones in the recent bush fires.

Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI (12 February 2009)

It is special that in the eternal city so many people have paused to think of those in great hardship in Australia.

Hon. Tim Fischer AC, Ambassador to the Holy See

SUNDAY 15 MARCH 2009: REMEMBRANCE SERVICE IN LA TROBE VALLEY

Latrobe City Council, with the Combined Churches of the Latrobe Valley held a service based on a liturgy prepared by Michael Hansen, Director of Faith and Ministry at Lavalla Catholic College, and Diocesan Liturgy Coordinator, Sophy Morley.

Archbishop Hart addresses the National Day of Mourning service at Rod Laver Arena, 22 February 2009.





BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012

Top right: Visitors from the bushfire communities sat together at the front of St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, 29 November 2009.

Centre right: Grade three Catholic students from St Helen's Primary School, Essex, England send prayers to Kinglake.

Bottom right: Past and present Kinglake parishioners and friends participate in the Mass to celebrate the opening of the new St Mary's Church, 2011.



PHOTO BY CASAMENTO PHOTOGRAPHY

SATURDAY 18 JULY: BLESSING OF MARYSVILLE TEMPORARY CHURCH

Bishop Les Tomlinson blessed a temporary church to serve as a place of worship for the district's Catholic and other congregations.

Prayer is a great means of finding hope and healing in such horrific events.

Fr Julian Langridge

SUNDAY 29 NOVEMBER: BUSHFIRE RECOVERY MASS AT ST PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL, MELBOURNE

173 roses were placed on the steps of the Cathedral sanctuary and the family and friends of those who died in the bushfires took the roses with them after the Mass.

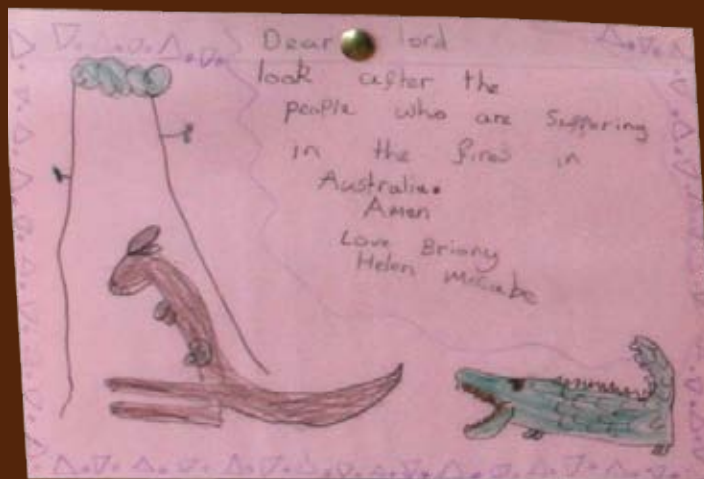
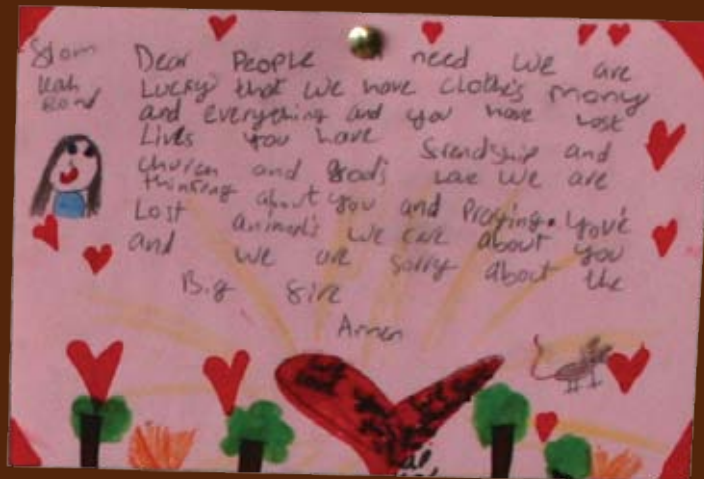
The paradox of these events is they are the occasion for the emergence of the greatness of the human spirit.

Archbishop Denis Hart

SUNDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2010: ANNIVERSARY SERVICE FOR THE COMMEMORATION OF BLACK SATURDAY IN SALE

We have no one location. We are scattered across Victoria, across the country, across the globe. One year ago our lives changed forever. Our son was killed by the bushfire, our house and memories destroyed. On that day we lost our past, our present and our future.

Carol Matthews, bushfire survivor



The candle made by Sr Diana.

Mrs Joanne Webber, St Mary's Catholic Primary School at Alexandra.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FR JULIAN LANGRIDGE



PHOTO BY CASAMENTO PHOTOGRAPHY



PHOTO BY JEREMY YUEN

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY'S RECOVERY STRATEGY

*The Archdiocese's commitment through CatholicCare was **long term** because we knew how long it would take for these communities to rebuild. From the outset we were careful not to impose our preconceived notions of the kind of services needed. The principle of 'walking with' people is fundamental to all our Bushfire Recovery Services.*

JANET CRIBBES, BUSHFIRE COMMUNITY RECOVERY SERVICE (KAIROS CATHOLIC JOURNAL, FEBRUARY 2010)

Madeline, Isabella, Sr Margaret Ryan and Amelia in the animal nursery at the Royal Melbourne Show, 21 September 2009.



BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012

Right from the beginning we were determined that whatever we did it would be in the hands of the community. I am incredibly proud of our workers who were guided by people in these ravaged communities to provide exactly the services the communities believed they needed. And, I am deeply impressed with the way our organisation bent itself to meet the needs of the people distraught by the Black Saturday Bushfires.

FR JOE CADDY, CEO, CATHOLICCARE (2012)

Disaster recovery is a long term process and the donations from the Catholic community enabled these services to last more than three years. In fact, while the two Bushfire Recovery Teams in Gippsland and Sandhurst closed in December 2012, enough funds remain to continue CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service until December 2013.

Unlike many funding programs, the guidelines provided by the Appeal Committee were broad, enabling CatholicCare some degree of flexibility to design the style and type of services to be established according to community needs. This meant that on the ground, recovery workers had the rare opportunity to be guided by, and join, the communities themselves in creating a unique mix of outreach counselling and projects directed at their own recovery from the bushfires.

By August 2009, CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service (BCRS) was established at Kinglake, and two Bushfire Recovery Teams were operating in existing services in the Dioceses of Sandhurst and Sale.

CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service was originally to be located in Whittlesea, but the destruction in the Shire of Murrindindi was so great, Kinglake stood out as the best location to reach bushfire survivors. BCRS works with survivors in the **Kinglake Ranges, Marysville, Whittlesea, Strathewen, Alexandra, Flowerdale, Clonbinane, Nillumbik, Buxton, and Yea**. In the first three years 2,280 counselling sessions, and 4,400 hours of staff time were provided to community partnerships and collaborative projects. BCRS also partnered with local church-based organisations to form the Community On Ground Assistance Project. On 1 July 2012 the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund (VBAF) funded the roll out of this project state wide and the continuation of the partnership to mid-2014. The BCRS team of 15 is primarily funded from the Archbishop's Bushfire Appeal, five positions are funded through VBAF, and the Sister of Mercy Order provides the pastoral care worker's stipend.

Glenn Little, CatholicCare Councillor
and bushfire survivor, John Roycroft.



THE RESILIENCE OF A HUMMING BIRD



PHOTO BY JANET CRIBBES

It is 83 days since Black Saturday. I spend a good part of the week driving from one community to another. The statistics are at the forefront of my mind; 78 towns, 7,000 people, more than 2,300 properties damaged. Not to mention the 173 who perished.

I almost can't comprehend the magnitude of the area covered in black-still. Despite the green appearing.

I sit behind trucks going up and down Kinglake mountain, up and down the Black Spur. They go up empty and come down filled with the scrap metal that was once someone's life. I wonder if the owner had a chance to sift through their remains, whether they had one final farewell. And, I wonder what that farewell would look like anyway.

People tell me their 'gut' heaves when they hear the trucks. They know this day, today, they are clearing their friend's place up the road. Their own place is safe. They tell me they feel the finality of it all.

The noise of the trucks plummets them back to the day of the fire. It doesn't take much to draw them back. A stranger asking how they are brings stinging tears. The encounter isn't long, then they're left to get on with each day as it comes.

Stories of courage and inspiration, of sheer bloody mindedness are many and often. As I drive behind another truck pushing up the hill, these stories remind me of the humming bird in the forest fire. It's an old story, about how the humming bird flew back and forth to the river collecting water and dropping it on the fire. Given the enormity of the fire, the other animals asked the humming bird what it was doing. 'I am doing what I can,' it replied.

Janet Cribbes, Bushfire Community Recovery Service
(*Kairos Catholic Journal*, May 2009)



BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012

The Small Poppy Fund, established with \$100,000 from the Archbishop's Bushfire Appeal and \$150,000 given directly to CatholicCare from The Whitehouse Foundation in Queensland, was administered by BCRS to contribute to projects identified by communities, such as the **Marysville Marathon** and the **McMahon Bridge Project**. Specific items such as the trailer and log splitter bought for the **Wood-fire Project**, **Tourist Information Boards** to bring attention to local businesses, **Christmas Hampers** and **relief with school fees** were also funded through The Small Poppy Fund.

Centacare Gippsland Bushfire Recovery Team in the Diocese of Sale, initiated its bushfire response while the fires were still burning. Fires had been burning there all summer which prompted Arda Tymmenssen, the then director to secure a grant from the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to employ their first Bushfire Recovery Worker located at Warragul and Pakenham – a grief counsellor who began work on 17 March 2009.

In September 2009 Centacare Gippsland received funds from the Archbishop's Bushfire Appeal for three part time workers: one part time community development worker and counsellor

and one part time counsellor, located at Morwell and a grief counsellor located in Warragul and Pakenham. The Recovery Service offered relationship and grief counselling, volunteer training and peer support programs, help for carers, clergy and pastoral workers, and training in leadership skills. Initially families received office based counselling, but after the first year families either could not afford or, in some instances, were too traumatised to come into the towns. Consequently, outreach counselling was provided – a completely new way of working for Centacare Gippsland. Up to March 2012, the service helped a total 188 people. The service initiated and collaborated to offer over 15 community projects in Callignee, Traralgon South, Gormandale, Boolara Rail Trail, Labertouche, Noojee, Neerim South and Jindivik.

CentaCare Sandhurst's Bushfire Recovery Team was also involved from the beginning. The day after the fire at Long Gully Sandhurst, staff were already working at the Bendigo Bushfire Emergency Crisis Centre. When it closed, six days later, CentaCare staff offered crisis counselling and referral in Long Gully and Eaglehawk and at its Bendigo Office. Working with organisations such as St Liborius Parish and Access Employment in Eaglehawk, the service provided individual

A TOOL BOX OF SELF CARE

The Bushfire Recovery worker in Strathewen noticed a hierarchy of worthiness had developed in the bushfire communities. Community members, mostly women, graded themselves as not deserving help in the presence of others perceived to be worse off. A Creative Arts Therapist ran this series of three workshops incorporating drawing, painting, ritual, creative writing, dance, meditation and group discussion in a beautiful venue with childcare and nutritious food provided for the participants. The project built self-esteem, friendship and information sharing for women in the area.



During CatholicCare Family Week, mums at Sacred Heart Primary in Yea were pampered with makeovers by their children.

PHOTO SUPPLIED BY CENTACARE

and family counselling, general and mental health support, financial counselling, social engagement projects, personal and professional development support and access to user friendly information on services.

By July 2009, CentaCare Sandhurst had extended its programs to Redesdale where they offered counselling, and the very successful Elmore Field Day program which is now an annual event. In that same month it received funds from the Archbishop's Bushfire Appeal for a community development counsellor and community development worker. In February 2011, the team was supplemented by one part time worker for six months, with funds provided by the Department of Health Services. Approximately 500 individuals and families across the Redesdale and Bendigo areas received direct counselling, and over 20 community development projects occurred in Bendigo, Mount Alexander, parts of the Macedon Ranges and the Shire of Mitchell.

A COMMUNITY LED RECOVERY STRATEGY

A Community Led Recovery Strategy requires workers to form alliances and partnerships, avoid service duplication and instigate projects which will transform communities. The Recovery Worker inspires communities with a future only possible because of the disaster. He, or she, aims to create enduringly sustainable communities, leaving them in better shape than they were before the catastrophe.

Recovery Workers recognise that the devastated community is best placed to decide how it will recover, and at what pace. They provide safe environments to express concerns, articulate needs, envisage their new future and pinpoint strategies to manifest that future. Recovery Workers embrace community members equitably, discover the community's strengths, facilitate conflict resolution, identify and build leadership skills, and link the community with resources required for a successful recovery.

CatholicCare Bushfire Recovery Workers across the bushfire zone became valued members of local groups; they spearheaded collaborative projects which built strength and resilience in what were once shattered communities.

In the end, Recovery Workers need to know when it is time to move on, when crisis groups need to disband and when a sturdy recovery is within reach.

VOICES AROUND THE CAMPFIRE

Another project designed to build resilience was Voices Around the Campfire. It provided harmony and unity across multicultural communities.



PHOTOS COURTESY CATHOLICCARE

CatholicCare was the only organisation that came and asked the community what they wanted, then went about trying to meet that need even if it meant going beyond their core business.

Bill Gale, former chair, Community Representative Committee, Kinglake Ranges (June 2012)



BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

The most abiding scar in disaster survivors is found in the soul. It takes time before people are ready to speak their suffering. Initially they need help with basics – food, housing and maintaining their income. People are often not ready to 'let go' until the necessities are settled. Those who consider their feelings less worthy in the face of those they believe are harder hit will not come forward until others have been attended to. Often the grief and trauma is 'stuck' to raw emotions in play before the catastrophe. These must also be resolved before recovery is complete. The complex range of emotions surface slowly.

Recovery means dealing with the tendency to avoid reminders and having intrusive flashbacks. Some are anxious, others are despondent and withdraw emotionally, consumed by grief and guilt. Relationships can be tense. Some are angry to the point of violence. Some dull the pain by drinking too much or taking drugs. Many ask if this is normal. After all, the fire has passed, the Royal Commission has concluded, they should have moved on. But they are only just touching emotions frozen at the time to survive.

The first anniversary of the Black Saturday Bushfires, and every anniversary thereafter, creates stress for survivors. Many worried about the first winter, but the first summer brought, as seasons do, remembrances – the first heatwave, the first total fire ban day. Predictions of earlier and more severe weather events can also trigger fears and anxieties in survivors. Some children express their trauma by not wanting to leave home, being fearful of smoke, having nightmares. One woman dreamt she couldn't contact her husband and sons – a flashback to the day when she believed they were dead.

Bushfire Recovery Workers help survivors by holding the space for them to heal at their own pace. They consider the psychological, social and economic needs of each person and their context before and after the crisis – their gender, age, cultural background and family situation. Bushfire Recovery Workers empower people by helping them establish and achieve goals at their own pace.

An event as enormous as the Black Saturday Bushfires can precipitate trauma resulting in students refusing to go to school. Along with counselling individuals, couples and families, Bushfire Recovery Workers offered services to children and adolescents in schools throughout the bushfire zone. Bushfire Recovery Workers also developed a range of group activities including specific grief and trauma programs for children, such as CatholicCare's program **Seasons**, the adolescent grief program **Stormbirds**, and the **Kids Grieve Too** workshop offered in Hurstbridge in a collaboration between BCRS and the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement. All of our Bushfire Recovery Services provided activities to give space to deal with the trauma and build self-esteem. They included **Parenting Support Groups** to deal with anxious children, **Pampering Days** at Toora, Thorpdale and Traralgon South, the **Women of the Ranges** workshop in Flowerdale, and the **Wellbeing Self Care Workshops** in Gippsland.

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

PSALM 23:4



Black Saturday survivors, Daniel, Sandra and Jacqueline enjoy a family fun day at the Royal Melbourne Show.



PHOTO BY FIONA POWER

The original CatholicCare Melbourne team. Left to right: Aicha Brogan, Fiona Dixon, Tracey Bowden (B), Janet Cribbes, Glenn Little (B), Marg Welsh, Sr Margaret Ryan, Kate Brilli. Absent: Sheryl Lyons.

A WAY TO MEND OUR BROKEN HEARTS

Saturday 7 February 2009 was surreal – oppressively hot, eerie, devoid of life. It unfolded into a nightmare of unimaginable destruction; a day seared into our hearts. How could anyone foretell the catastrophic events of that day? We cannot change destiny, or the past; we must learn from what happened, repair, and move forward as best we can.

The Black Saturday Bushfires were an incredible journey in faith for my family. There was heartbreak, trauma and great pain. From these afflictions came resilience. Faith, prayer and belief in God gave us comfort and strength through desolate times; times when we could see no light. We held our faith, prayed and believed that each tomorrow would be a better day.

We took one day at a time, one moment at a time, trying not to remember how life was before the bushfires. We cannot long, or yearn for, or dwell there, our lives will never be the same. We don't look too far into the future either, doing so can be overwhelming. We have learnt to be gentle with ourselves, not heal everything. Rather we diffuse the pain into a memory which, from time to time, resurfaces and tempts, like Satan, into a downward spiral.

We knew we could not do this alone but it is the most difficult thing to ask for help, and accept it with grace and gratitude. CatholicCare helped our children find a new school and returned desperately needed normality to our lives. They gave us the opportunity to leave our charred landscape. Going to the Royal Melbourne Show was a kindness I will never forget. These acts gave us hope, a fresh start, a way to mend our broken hearts.

Mary Ann Von Struppi, bushfire survivor
(Kairos Catholic Journal, March 2010)

A BUSHFIRE RECOVERY WORKER'S DAY – LOVE WITHOUT AGENDA

Love is the force that keeps the world from falling apart. On Black Saturday many people's world fell apart. As I work with the communities in the Shire of Nillumbik, I find love is the driving force behind what we do. It is a particular love – love without agenda. Relationships lie at the heart of this kind of love and relationships can be uncomfortable. Staying open to this kind of love feels timid, like a bird afraid to leave its nest.

Often our work is not visible because much of it is 'process work'.

In the Shire of Nillumbik I am involved in strategic planning, long term service development and setting social policy directions. I have a participatory approach and help people and groups build the skills they need for the wellbeing of the overall community.

How does this look? I negotiate with organisations on behalf of individuals and communities. I facilitate workshops for small and large service providers. I collaborate on developing recovery plans, and support the formation of collaborative responses to community needs.

Many of the projects funded by the Archbishop's Bushfire Appeal are stories of courage and hope, opportunity and regeneration. The beliefs and behaviours Bushfire Recovery Workers bring to creating social change are crucial to the success of these projects.

Daily, I work with my own fears, staying open and being gentle with others. It is not easy or straightforward and requires love. But, love is work, an achievement of the soul.

Margaret Welsh, Bushfire Community Recovery Service
(Kairos Catholic Journal, June 2010)



BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Our Bushfire Recovery Workers collaborated closely with people, groups and organisations in the bushfire communities to identify the projects that would best meet their needs. What follows are only highlights of the community projects Bushfire Recovery Workers either instigated or engaged in. All these were made possible by the donations the Catholic community made to the Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal.

They form four categories: Mediation and Community Liaison; Ecotherapy; Social Gatherings, Outings and Getaways and Arts Therapy.

MEDIATION AND COMMUNITY LIAISON

Disaster Recovery is peppered with tensions requiring delicate negotiations. Our Bushfire Recovery Workers were instrumental in supporting communities through these challenges. One fine example of this was a mediation that took place in the Sandhurst Diocese.

The sight of burnt, dead trees left on land in a public space deeply affected some residents in the Bendigo area. Despite countless discussions, letters and petitions to the relevant authority over three years, people were frustrated that both state and local governments refused to remove the trees. Bushfire Recovery Workers initiated a mediation process through the Department of Justice to resolve the issue. It took 5 hours on a day in October 2011 before the relevant authorities agreed to action and the trees were removed. The relief at this agreement allowed people to move on in their recovery process.

ECOTHERAPY

Ecotherapy alleviates distress by connecting our internal and external worlds. Caring for the natural environment shows us how to nurture ourselves. Our Bushfire Recovery Workers either instigated or participated in Ecotherapy projects which simultaneously rejuvenated the bushfire zone and its people.

In Kinglake a **Place-Making Workshop**, run by David Engwicht, demonstrated how to rebuild a fire-ravaged town to an attractive, comfortable, friendly place. **Garden Restoration Projects** took place in Strathewen, Gippsland and Redesdale.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHOLIC CARE



This image and above: volunteers working on Garden Restoration Projects.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHOLIC CARE



PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHOLIC CARE

The Kinglake Place-Making Workshop brought beauty and a sense of community back to the local environment.



PHOTO BY EDDIE STANOJEVIC

John Roycroft attended the first fishing weekend at Bemm River with his teenage son Jayden. They lost their family home in Flowerdale on Black Saturday.



COURTESY OF CENTACARE SANDHURST

Men's Getaway Weekends proved so successful in emotional recovery, they received further government funding.

Veg Out St Kilda organised a day when herb and vegetable pots were assembled and distributed to residents. **The Redesdale Garden Restoration Project** included garden design workshops, vouchers that supported the local garden businesses to contribute plants, services and tools. As part of this project participants were also funded to attend the **International Flower and Garden Show in Melbourne** for inspiration.

Rejuvenation Week in Mitchell brought Darraweit Guim Primary School children, teachers and parents into nature. Along the Giddy Trail in Wandong, they planted native plants and placed nesting hutches and breeding boxes to bring back the wildlife. CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service collaborated with The Men's Shed, State Forest Park and Wildlife Rangers, Local Council members and the Salvation Army to organise this project in Mitchell.

Other Ecotherapy projects included the **Mirboo Bridge and Walkway Restoration Project** and the **Bus Stop Beautification Projects** in Gippsland.

SOCIAL GATHERINGS, OUTINGS AND GETAWAYS

It's really important for us to organise holidays and outings. To offset the hard work and stress of recovery efforts, parents need to hear their children laugh again.

*Sr Margaret Ryan RSM AO, Kinglake Hospitality Centre
(Kairos Catholic Journal, September 2009)*

Recreation brings fun, laughter and moments of wisdom contained in serendipitous conversations with other survivors and skilled Bushfire Recovery Workers. In subtle ways recreation makes a community more resilient. The following activities recreated the communities of the bushfire zones.

Social Gatherings in Kinglake for Young People, the St Andrews Weekly Soup Night and Marysville Big Screen project gave regular meeting places.

Day Outings to The Royal Melbourne Show and Elmore Field Days offered a healing break from the burnt environment. The Marysville/Kinglake bus trip, organised by CentaCare Sandhurst, took 17 Redesdale people to see what was possible for their own future.

Weekend Getaways across the bushfire zones were designed specifically for young people, women and men, and permitted intimate time for people to reflect on their thoughts and feelings with our skilled Bushfire Recovery Workers and peers. For example, the Rejuvenation Camp for Rural and Farming Families provided restoration for families in Gippsland, and the Youth Leadership Camp took 30 young people from Bendigo, Redesdale and Macedon to the Anglesea YMCA for esteem building physical activities such as canoeing.

Bemm River Trips for Men began when a Bushfire Recovery Worker at CatholicCare Bushfire Recovery Service (BCRS) in Kinglake discovered that a fishing trip planned for men was faltering. The project was the inspiration of workers at the community managed program, Hurstbridge Community Hub. They recognised the particular emotional challenges faced by men who had survived the Black Saturday Bushfires and organised a getaway. The men were ready to go, but Hurstbridge Community Hub workers could not secure adequate funding for the men's trip. Because the fishing trip also included the presence of Recovery Workers from local service agencies, the project obtained a significant seeding grant through the Small Poppy Fund - a fund created from the Archbishop's Bushfire Appeal and The Whitehorse Foundation in Queensland.



BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012



COURTESY OF CENTACARE SANDHURST

Left and centre: The Youth Leadership Camp & Rejuvenation Camp for Rural and Farming Families provided opportunities for building self esteem.



These trips were so successful in aiding the men's recovery that VBRR funded \$500,000 for a series of men's getaways over 12 months, which included activities such as Bush Furniture Making, Skiing Weekends and a Special Forces Challenge with the Australian Defence Force.

The Marysville Big Screen Project was a collaboration between Regional Arts Victoria, Fed Square Pty Ltd and CatholicCare Melbourne. In September 2009, the old screen from Federation Square was brought to Marysville for five months to add colour and movement to a black landscape. People watched the AFL Football finals season, saw a series of animated shorts produced by school children in the region, welcomed the Bin Short Film Festival, bet on the Melbourne Cup, sang Carols by Candlelight, swooned at New Year's fireworks, gathered for Australia Day and, a few weeks later, celebrated the first anniversary of their recovery from the firestorm.

The Women's Retreat Weekend at Feathertop Chalet of November 2010, acknowledged the second Anniversary of Black Saturday. CentaCare Sandhurst collaborated with 'Our Place', of the City of Greater Bendigo, and St Luke's Anglicare in Bendigo to take 35 women from Bendigo and Redesdale regions to Feathertop Chalet. The women shared good food, laughter and mountain walking in companionship with others.

We were a bit surprised that not so many people came forward for counselling, but we realised they were talking to each other. The thing is, people often didn't identify their emotional problems as related to the bushfires. They would come to deal with tensions in their families, or the high levels of anxiety they were feeling, or their sadness. It was through the conversation that they discovered their troubles were related to the disaster.

Liz March, CentaCare Sandhurst (May 2012)

The Women's Retreat Weekend at Feathertop Chalet, November 2010.



PHOTO COURTESY CATHOLICCARE

The Small Poppy Fund enabled funds from the Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal to contribute to the Marysville Marathon Festival, a community-led project organised by Dr Lachlan Fraser pictured below.



PHOTO BY PAUL GRECH

The Marysville Big Screen Project.



PHOTO COURTESY CATHOLICCARE

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY'S RECOVERY STRATEGY



COURTESY OF CENTACARE SANDHURST



PHOTO BY FIONA POWER

Black Saturday survivors, Tessa and Crystal enjoy some stress relief at the Royal Melbourne Show, September 2009.

The power of the outreach model to rebuild people's lives stood out for me. After the first year people stopped coming into the office for counselling because they lived or had been resettled far out, financial constraints prevented them from driving to the office, they were busy reconstructing their lives or they didn't consider they needed counselling. One person couldn't drive alone into town because of panic attacks brought on by the bushfires. We realised that if we were going to continue giving service to these people we would have to go to them.

Jamie Edwards, Centacare Gippsland (May 2012)

Reconstruction programs are slow after a disaster. The frustrations of bureaucracy hit hard. The process of recovery is protracted – it takes years, not months.

Peter Hosking SJ, Jesuit Social Services (Kairos Catholic Journal, May 2009)

We feel as though we are crossing a rushing river by jumping from rock to rock, and at each leap wondering if there will be another rock while the ones we just left are disappearing even as we lift our feet. We cannot see the shore.

Angela Blanchard, Pioneer in Disaster Recovery Programs (August 2011)

Across Victoria we feel a bond with the communities of the firestorm. We walk with them quietly, wanting to do more than is possible to rebuild their lives. For some, recovery is harder than could ever be conceived.

Janet Cribbes, Bushfire Community Recovery Service (Kairos Catholic Journal, February 2010)

The bushfires were only one calamity in a string of disasters to hit the Diocese of Sandhurst. First there was the ten-year drought, then the Black Saturday Bushfires, then floods followed by plagues of locusts and mice.

School teachers report that weather events bring on scatty behaviour in students. It took some time to realise that when rain comes, or when summer begins to heat up, these things trigger reactions embedded in unconscious memories of the string of disasters that have hit this region.

Liz March, CentaCare Sandhurst (May 2012)



BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012

All three schools lost teachers, students and families to the bushfires. The schools opened their doors immediately after the bushfires, becoming gathering places. By bringing together these three schools we hope to give joy to those who suffered, and forge community links that will last for years to come.

AICHA BROGAN, BUSHFIRE COMMUNITY RECOVERY SERVICE (KAIROS CATHOLIC JOURNAL, APRIL 2010)

ART THERAPY

Being creative allows God to flow through us. These projects encouraged the creativity of survivors.

Rising from the Ashes Documentary

CatholicCare Bushfire Recovery Service was one of many contributors in the creation of this documentary which gave voice to survivors. Inherent in the film is a message of hope for a future beyond this national tragedy.

Narrative and Photography Project

The Narrative and Photography Project is a powerful collection of photos and stories collected from people affected by the Redesdale Fire to produce *After the Fire*, a booklet honouring survivors of the Black Saturday Bushfires.

Resilience and Optimism Concert

On Friday 7 May, exactly three months after the Black Saturday Bushfires, 70 students from Whittlesea Secondary College, Healesville High School and Alexandra Secondary College joined 35 members of the Royal Australian Navy Band to workshop concert band pieces. In the evening there was a concert – The Resilience and Optimism Concert. The audience was taken through an emotional journey with pieces ranging from Jeff Buckley’s version of ‘Hallelujah’ to an uplifting performance of ‘The Man From Snowy River’.

Four months later, in September, the Royal Australian Navy Band again joined the students for an afternoon mentoring session and a performance at Williamstown High School. The project evolved from collaboration between CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service in Kinglake, the Royal Australian Navy Band, community organisations and local businesses including the City of Whittlesea, Rotary, Hal Leonard Australia, McKenzie’s Tourist Services, Musicorp Australia, Domino’s Pizza, Neverfail and Routleys Bakery. This collaboration has been so successful it has become an ongoing project.

Grand opening of the Art Show that provided another avenue for healing and recovery.



Some of our band members were personally affected by the bushfires. We felt these young people deserved a positive experience and to receive a pat on their back for their performance.

LIEUTENANT MATT KLOHS, MUSIC DIRECTOR OF THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY BAND
(KAIROS CATHOLIC JOURNAL, APRIL 2010)



Resilience and Optimism Concert, 7 May 2010.

PHOTO COURTESY CATHOLICCARE

Performing with the Navy Band is really helping me with my skills and it's great to have a fun day like this where we can put our experiences in the past. We all went through the same kind of thing—whatever town we came from.

REBECCA, WHITTLESEA SECONDARY STUDENT (KAIROS CATHOLIC JOURNAL, APRIL 2010)



BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012



Time will be the essence of everything. Nature changes, life changes, and we now have to do in two years what it took us forty years to do.

ANGELA JONES, BUXTON, FROM THE *SPIRIT SERIES*, SEPTEMBER 2009 (ABOVE)

Spirit of the Spine Project

As nature slowly regenerates, so too do communities. Through the Small Poppy Fund, CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service (BCRS) supported photographer Viv Mehes to create a photographic project called *Spirit of the Spine*. The project combines photography with stories told by community members from the bushfire affected areas, in order to reflect on the collective trauma and the path to recovery. In Easter 2010, portraits and stories from the project were exhibited at Taggerty Hall, drawing an audience of

more than 1200, and a smaller exhibition was subsequently held at Kinglake. During these exhibitions, community members were able to reflect on their experiences in a supportive environment, and a number of people self-referred to BCRS counselling services through this initiative. *Spirit of the Spine* involves more than a hundred people from communities across the Shires of Murrindindi, Whittlesea, Nillumbik, Yarra Ranges and Mitchell. A book will be published in 2013.

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY'S RECOVERY STRATEGY



I started walking through the burnt landscape, trying to understand where I lived now. I collected charcoal in the buckets I used for fighting the fire. I just started picking up pieces wherever I went. It seemed the natural thing to do – charcoal became our new environment.

SUE PERRY, KINGLAKE, FROM THE SPIRIT SERIES, NOVEMBER 2009 (ABOVE)



Renovating our home for us was a healing of the brokenness.

ANGELA PALMER,
KINGLAKE.
FROM THE LATER SERIES,
JUNE 2012 (RIGHT)

BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012



PHOTO BY CASAMENTO PHOTOGRAPHY

Mass for Bushfire Victims held at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, 2009.

Memorials

Creating a memorial is a delicate task, but crucial for a community's transformation. More than just physical structures, they involve remembrance rituals, opportunities for reflection and education. In the end, they represent the community and hold meaning for every community member. Memorials were established across the bushfire zone. Our Bushfire Recovery Workers were involved with memorials at Kinglake, Strathewen, Callignee and Gormandale.

Even though this tragedy was a national and international event, the locals want to keep the anniversary observance local. People wonder how they will get through the day. They are frightened of reliving the memories. They hope to help each other through the anniversary day, through the anniversary week.

Glenn Little, Bushfire Community Recovery Service (Kairos Catholic Journal, March 2010)

Callignee Memorial Project

For us, every day is an anniversary.

Bushfire survivor (Kairos Catholic Journal, March 2010)

On 7 February 2012 the people of Callignee remembered the Black Saturday Bushfires when they unveiled a memorial covered in tiles handmade by community members. The Premier, Hon. Ted Baillieu, and Deputy Premier, Hon. Peter Ryan, Minister for Bushfire Response, unveiled the memorial in the presence of over 100 people.

Starting 18 months after the bushfires, people met every Thursday to make the memorial. To involve everyone, a tile making workshop was held at Traralgon South State School, and tile making packages were delivered to everyone's homes.

During workshops and meetings, participants told their stories and overcame their shyness about creating art. They noted the irony of making tiles with fire, and recognised they were forming a new relationship with fire.

It was the memorial service of the second anniversary of the bushfires when floods came to Gippsland. I was at the community gathering in Labertouche and they had a collection for the people of the floods. These people are as poor as church mice but they wanted to give back to the community that had helped them. \$1,000 was collected that day. They were really proud of what they were able to give back because it meant they were thinking beyond themselves. It was the beginning of their recovery, not as individuals, but as a community.

Therese Kearney, Centacare Gippsland (May 2012)

The Memorial in Callignee was something I knew I could contribute to, something I could assist with in recognition of the Black Saturday Bushfires. I could never have imagined the effects of that fire. I thought I'd lost my community and I needed it back. I volunteered to lead the memorial project.

The project unfolded so very differently to what I expected. I didn't expect the support. I thought everyone would be too busy rebuilding their lives. But this became part of our lives and everybody was determined to give it the recognition it deserved. Everyone gave and did what they could, just as it was after the bushfires. Coming together regularly we could make suggestions about the memorial and share our experiences. We could reflect on our losses and focus on what our community wanted for its future - somewhere quiet, to sit and reflect, somewhere beautiful.

Leanne Crowe, memorial volunteer (February 2012)

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY'S RECOVERY STRATEGY

Marcellin College students lend a helping hand to clean up properties devastated by the Black Saturday bushfires.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SR MARGARET RYAN

THE COMMUNITY ON GROUND ASSISTANCE PROJECT - A CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP

A creative partnership between CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service (BCRS) and community groups in the Kinglake region resulted in CatholicCare Melbourne administering Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund (VBAF) funds for the Community On Ground Assistance project (COGA). This is the story of how BCRS collaborated with local community projects to restore people's properties and rebuild their lives across the state.

When BCRS began operations at Kinglake there was no specific volunteer services in the Kinglake Ranges area, yet after the fires the number of volunteers in that region was prolific. So BCRS supported the establishment of the Kinglake

Ranges Volunteer Resource Centre. In the winter of 2009 there was a firewood crisis. The Department of Human Services called together a number of community groups to decide how to get firewood to disadvantaged residents in the region. It was at this time BCRS was introduced to two unique community projects already engaged in the area.

Immediately after the fires, a small group of residents in Kinglake Ranges began to clean up each others' properties. The task was enormous and with funds from the Samaritans Purse the group expanded to employ local people to help out. At the same time, in Yarra Glen and Kinglake, a project started to provide skilled trades people to mend fences, fell trees, make carpentry repairs and conduct medium sized rebuilding. All of these initiatives worked toward securing Certificates of Occupancy, so people could return to their homes.

BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012



Left: Catholic school students volunteered to help clean up bushfire affected properties.

Over time these two groups formed into two different teams - the Kinglake Ranges residents became the *Property Recovery Assistance Team* providing help under the supervision of qualified, experienced tradespeople. They cleared the land using bobcats and machinery donated by Rotary District 9800, the Salvation Army and CatholicCare, and arranged tree felling of dangerous trees, splitting and stacking the timber for firewood. The Yarra Glen and Kinglake group became the *Trade Skills Assistance Team* whose professional help included advice to bushfire survivors about rebuilding and recovering their properties, project planning and coordination, advocacy for bushfire survivors and liaison with other helpful services.

The two projects worked, and continue to work closely with the *Kinglake Ranges Volunteer Resource Centre* to organise volunteer activities in the communities of the bushfire zone. From the beginning, the generous help of corporate volunteers made this one of the most effective and valuable services to survivors.

In December 2010, the two teams combined to become the *Community On Ground Assistance (COGA)* project which partnered with CatholicCare to receive VBAF funding to continue their work. Thus on behalf of COGA, in a contractual relationship with Regional Development Victoria, and through the infrastructure of CatholicCare Melbourne, BCRS took on the administration of these funds and coordinators, Janeden River and Matt Falla, took responsibility for day-to-day management of the project.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SR MARGARET RYAN

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY'S RECOVERY STRATEGY



PHOTOS COURTESY CATHOLIC CARE



Scenes from the COGA project.

The chopping down of dead trees, the clearing of others and the building and maintenance work of the volunteers from the COGA project brought a profound change for both participants and survivors; a change which far outweighed the actual amount of work received.

To date, the COGA partnership has worked on over 200 devastated properties in Chum Creek, Toolangi, Steels Creek, Castella, Dixons Creek, Glenburn, Yarra Glen, Christmas Hills, St Andrews, Strathewen, Humevale, Kinglake West, Flowerdale, Hazeldene, Pheasant Creek and Kinglake. In July 2012, CatholicCare Melbourne secured a further \$2.9 million from VBAF to roll out this successful property recovery across the state until mid-2014.

Of all the things offered to me since the bushfire, this has been the most positive. Knowing Matt and the boys has been life enhancing.

I did not know where to begin, or if I could begin again.

We had hit rock bottom, were exhausted. I felt like a failure. To have someone come and ask 'what can we do?' without too many forms to fill in was amazing.

To see the cladding go onto the house and watch it grow meant the world to both of us.

When Matt asked if I'd like help for building, I was stunned, then humbled. I'd been grumbling that the only help I'd got was for gardening. That was a long way down my list of priorities.

Now it's a home, not a shed.

They cleared the yard of branches from fallen trees, then cut, split and stacked the wood. They moved loads of soil and helped me build a new garden. They helped me make sense of the mess and plan for the future.

COGA Client, June 2011

WISDOM OF THE FIRE



The beauty of the Archbishop's Bushfire Appeal funding was twofold. First, it was for three years and trauma theories say recovery takes three to seven years. Secondly, it gave the flexibility to fit the service to the needs. So, when we saw the need to change, we could do so without having to re-negotiate the terms of the funding.

JAMIE EDWARDS, CENTACARE GIPPSLAND (MAY 2012)

BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012



The Community Led Recovery Strategy taught us to help clients in a different way—to listen and understand their need. And it taught us to envisage working in consultation with a whole range of organisations rather than just focusing on our own work and our own agency. In fact it has influenced the way we work so much that we've recently won a tender for a families service based on these same principles.

PAUL FOGARTY, CENTACARE SANDHURST (MAY 2012)

The Black Saturday Bushfires engaged CatholicCare in disaster recovery for the first time. This engagement taught us many things. We learnt it is crucial to be awake to people's needs and walk beside them rather than impose preconceived solutions. We learnt, above all, to be flexible. We found that community, indeed, lies at the heart of its own recovery, that listening, consulting, collaborating, working closely with people transforms the community. We learnt that establishing an efficient, effective strategic planning group at the local level is vital for acute insight into a community's needs and the smooth distribution of services and money. We discovered how challenging it is to integrate the emergency response with services already in the crisis area.

Professor Ruth Webber's evaluation found CatholicCare's services successfully addressed the immediate welfare needs of survivors and created communities in better shape than they were before the bushfires. She noted that while flexibility is central to this success, the reality is that flexibility either invigorates or challenges workers depending on their level of comfort with the fluctuating nature of recovery work. Crucially, Professor Webber recommended the implementation of a Diocesan Disaster Plan and a system to ensure sufficient priests, or pastoral associates, are registered with the Victorian Council of Churches so they are immediately available to help when a major disaster occurs.

We all must learn from every disaster so we are more surefooted the next time. However focusing only on past experience zaps our agility. Each disaster has its own personality articulated in simple things like a change in the wind's direction, or unexpected rain. We must invent as we go along.

We all now know that the disaster response service is a growing field. Since Black Saturday we have seen dramatic flooding, intense cyclone activity and severe bushfires around Australia. CatholicCare's Bushfire Recovery Services are a blue print for service models targeted at the most challenging problems of our times. Already we have provided training for groups such as the Recovery and Community Development staff of the Lockyer Valley Shire. We have learnt that our model is invaluable, precisely because of its community development principles which translate perfectly in all communities and cultures.

We learnt that disaster response takes longer than the three years we anticipated. People still call on our services for help with the trauma, financial and psychological challenges exacerbated by the bushfires. We know from experts, that recovery can take up to seven years. Already there have been remarkable achievements, the extraordinary resilience and resolve of the people of the bushfire zone promises full recovery soon.

*People need to maintain a pace that will last the distance.
Recovery from disaster is about running a marathon,
not winning a 100-metre sprint—even if that's what was
required to outrun the fire.*

DR ROB GORDON, INTERNATIONAL EXPERT ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO DISASTER
(FEBRUARY 2011)

Left: Kinglake West children Jamieson, Ledger and Desiree take a closer look at a fern that has sprouted in the Kinglake area, six weeks after Black Saturday.

FINANCIAL REPORT

On 9 February 2009 Archbishop Hart established the Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal. He appointed the following people to oversee the allocation of these funds to serve the needs of those affected by the Black Saturday Bushfires.

Archbishop's Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal Committee:

Chair:	Hon. Sir James Gobbo A.C. C.V.O. QC.
Members:	Bishop Les Tomlinson DD, Vicar General, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne (CAM) Sr Kath Tierney RSM Fergus D. Ryan, AO Julien O'Connell, Chairman Mercy Health

Assisting the Committee:

Francis Moore	Business Manager, CAM
Denis Fitzgerald	Executive Director, Catholic Social Services Victoria
Fr Joe Caddy	CEO, CatholicCare
Fr Greg Bourke	Bushfire Recovery Chaplain
Janet Cribbes	Manager, CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service
James O'Farrell	Director of Communications, CAM
Catherine McGovern	Secretary, Executive Assistant, CAM

BEYOND

Black Saturday

2009-2012



INCOME	
Donations received from the Catholic Community	\$3,961,840
Bank Interest	\$293,044
TOTAL	\$4,254,884

EXPENDITURE	
Group facilitating bushfire recovery/purpose or project	Donation amount
St Vincent de Paul Society - Emergency relief	\$150,000
Australian Red Cross - Emergency relief	\$50,000
Catholic Chaplains - Parish support	\$61,500
CatholicCare Melbourne - Kinglake Parish	\$15,000
CatholicCare Melbourne - Marysville Church	\$57,000
CatholicCare Melbourne - Emergency Relief	\$50,000
CatholicCare Melbourne - Alexandra & Yea Schools	\$28,150
CatholicCare Melbourne - Yea Presbytery	\$25,000
CatholicCare Melbourne - Whittlesea Respite Centre	\$20,000
CatholicCare Melbourne - Marysville temporary village	\$15,000
CatholicCare Melbourne - Big Screen Project	\$10,000
Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne - Commemoration service	\$4,280
CatholicCare Melbourne - Bushfire Recovery Project	\$2,880,954
CatholicCare Melbourne - Small Poppy Fund	\$100,000
Centacare Sale - Bushfire Recovery Project	\$400,000
CentaCare Sandhurst - Bushfire Recovery Project	\$388,000
TOTAL	\$4,254,884

The Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne also funded Australian Catholic University Research so that we can better prepare for future disasters and this Beyond Black Saturday Report to ensure that 100% of donations from the Catholic community could go directly to assist bushfire victims.



Thank you to donors, volunteers and staff

To the 6,716 Catholic individuals and organisations who gave almost \$4 million to help the victims of the Black Saturday bushfires. Also to the hundreds of volunteers and staff throughout the Catholic Community who helped tirelessly in so many ways. This report is the Archdiocese's way of honouring your generous and spontaneous acts of charity.

You gave as individuals, families, parishes, dioceses, archdioceses, schools, Catholic Education Offices, ethnic communities, religious congregations and communities, Catholic organisations, groups and movements, businesses, associations and clubs. Your donations came from throughout Victoria, across Australia and around the globe. The breadth and depth of your generosity is a tangible sign of the beauty of our Catholic community.

To each and every one of you who so generously donated to help the victims of Australia's worst bushfires, I offer my sincere and heartfelt gratitude. Thank you for being Christ's hands and feet – for providing hope amidst the darkness, for making a difference at a time when it seemed all hope was lost.

+ *Denis J. Hart*

Archbishop Denis J. Hart DD
Archbishop of Melbourne

AN EPIPHANY OF DEER

Olga Harris prayed as she fled the roaring inferno. It devoured her rented home. Olga, her husband, their two children and their animals raced to their friend's mill. They huddled with three other families in a kiln until the fire caught up with them. Later, as the families rushed to their cars, the mill was engulfed.

'It was like the fire was chasing us,' said Olga.

They drove through flames until they found shelter in a concrete cellar beneath a Narbethong shop.

'It was the closest thing to death,' Olga said. 'The next day, we saw the house. It broke my heart. Marysville looked like an atomic bomb had gone off. It was horrific, and so sad.'

Olga drew courage from the sympathy and support of Australians, and from her faith.

'I prayed all the time I was in that kiln, I can tell you that. From the moment I left home, it really helped me. Even now I thank God my family and I are alive.'

Survivors from Marysville now live across Victoria. The loss of community, of friends and relatives, homes, jobs and possessions affected people in different ways. Some found inspiration in faith, others found the pain too great, and some families have broken up.

'Some people had nowhere to go. They were fighting. It was killing them,' Olga said. 'People from Marysville are all scattered. I miss the people I used to see.'

Olga lost her housekeeping work when Marysville's guesthouses disappeared. Her employers perished in the fire. After the bushfires Olga found she didn't want Bruce to be too far away, so he gave up his fly-in-fly-out construction work in Queensland and found a job in Yea. The girls found places in schools in Alexandra and at Marysville Primary School which was relocated to Taggerty. It was important for Olga to stay in the area.

'I wouldn't like to go through it again,' Olga said. 'It's changed me - for the better. It's made me realise possessions aren't anything really. We survived and we just have to move on. It's slow but we'll get over it.'

In all the years Olga has lived in the mountain region of Marysville and Narbethong, she has never seen a deer. She knew they were there, but they had never appeared to her. One day, just months after the Black Saturday Bushfires, as if she was Noah glimpsing the rainbow, she saw two deer standing in the heart of her charred forest.

From Kairos Catholic Journal, May 2009



In Medieval Christian Bestiaries the deer is associated with the risen Christ.



*This awful catastrophe is not the end but the beginning.
History does not end thus. This is the way its chapters open.*

SAINT AUGUSTINE (354-430)