

## BUSHFIRE RESPONSE REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION

The tragedy of February 7 2009 and subsequent days, weeks and months was unprecedented and Churches of Christ like all agencies, including the Victorian Council of Churches (VCC) Emergency Ministries, faced circumstances beyond the scope of our previous systems and experience. Regardless of this the loving response from our churches and leaders practically, financially, in prayer and all manner of support was enormous. We give thanks for all who strived to do their best in the midst of crisis and at times, confusion. We also pause and learn so we can serve our communities graciously and more effectively in the future.

A review was conducted of the Churches of Christ involvement in the bushfire crisis and several recommendations were made. In summary, the review acknowledges that like all agencies, Churches of Christ tried to assist to the best of their knowledge and experience but, like most agencies, were unprepared for the scale of this disaster.

In Victoria around ten of our church communities were directly impacted and Conference staff became quickly involved when the true impact of the tragedy became apparent, with quick decisions being made to respond to the needs of victims. An appeal was commenced, the majority of funds being distributed to the Salvation Army and Red Cross Bushfire Appeals. Also, all churches in Victoria were invited to make trained and skilled pastoral people available to assist in the support of people in fire affected areas through the VCC Disaster Plan.

The fires highlighted our need to have structures in place to manage such incidents. The fires have also highlighted the need to train a greater number of our ministers, counsellors and chaplains in the specific skills and capacities required in 'trauma response' which has not necessarily been a part of their training. Debriefing for all involved is also critical and should be part of the process.

Psychological first-aid is coordinated through the VCC Emergency Chaplaincy Network. They are recognised by the Department of Human Services and in future incidents only chaplains and personal support volunteers accredited through the VCC will be allowed through checkpoints.

Key recommendations of the review include:

- Churches of Christ reaffirm their commitment to participate in the VCC Emergency Ministry and recognise them as the peak body in the event of emergencies in Victoria.

- Church of Christ Emergency Chaplains will be under the oversight of the VCC.
- An Emergency Response Group to be established under Mission and Ministry who will be responsible for the oversight of training and debriefing as well as manage the Church of Christ emergency responses.
- Procedures and processes will be put in place.
- Funds remaining from the CareWorks 2009 Bushfire Appeal be earmarked for future needs of victims, debriefing of Chaplains and use in future crisis situations.

### EMERGENCY RESPONSE COMMITTEE (ERG)

The ERG has been established and is putting systems in place. More ministers have been trained and registered, VCC 5 Point Plan has been redistributed, Conference Centre procedures are in place and involvement in the VCC Incident Co-ordination Centre is arranged.

Like all organisations, this is a work-in-progress, the needs of large scale emergencies are unpredictable and we will constantly learn and have to update after such an event.

The current ERG consists of:

**Monique ten Hoopen**, M&M: Community Mission

**Greg Illingworth**, M&M: Minister Care

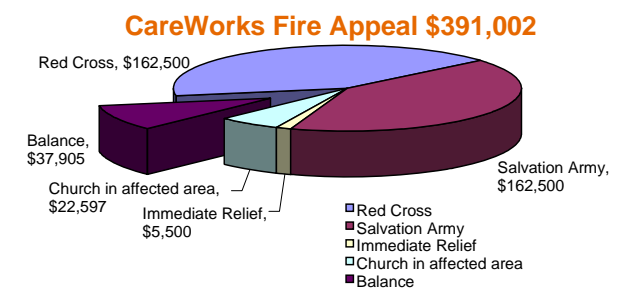
**Ian Smith**, Minister Thornbury Church, a Vice President of the VCC, VCC Emergency Ministries State Committee, Regional and Area Chaplain Coordinator

**Glynnis Hearn**, Pastoral Associate Minister Mulgrave Church, Chaplain CCTC, CCTC Sessional lecturer, on Committee of Management of the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

**Cheryl Johnson**, Minister Northern Community Church.

**Rod Brown**, Minister Boronia Church

### CAREWORKS 2009 BUSHFIRE APPEAL UPDATE



We thank you for your generosity to this appeal. The CareWorks 2009 Bushfire Appeal has closed. As recommended by the Review, unallocated funds will be held for future needs of victims, debriefing of Chaplains and use in future crisis situations.

# STORIES FROM THE

## MARYSVILLE-LIVING BEYOND TRAGEDY

February 7th is etched in our memories as a day of unimaginable tragedy and personal loss. Many of the 36 lives lost in Marysville as fires of unmatched intensity swept across the State of Victoria were known to us. Some of them were friends others were people we had served on committees with, conducted weddings and funerals for, and with whom we had shared a great love for our town. "Our Town" because we had lived there for 16 years raising our family and like many others serving the community. We have grieved with a friend who lost his wife and two sons. We have felt deeply for relatives who lost their home and belongings. We have listened to those who have lost their businesses and their livelihoods and like thousands of others we have asked the unanswerable questions.

The outpouring of loss and grief was matched only by the outpouring of unbelievable love and generosity. For several days the world watched in horror as the real extent of this traumatic event became known. They not only watched however but they gave money and goods, time and skills and offered their prayers for those who had lost loved ones, property and possessions.

The Churches of Marysville and Buxton have played an important role in the recovery process and it was at their invitation that Julia and I facilitated groups called CONNECT for the Community. These seminars aimed at not only giving people additional skills for dealing with their own issues but also equipped them to help others struggling with grief, depression and traumatic stress. Those who attended not only listened to the teaching but participated in small groups, telling their stories and listening to others tell theirs.

It is time to salute the people of Marysville. We honour those who lost their lives. We honour those who

have survived the last 12 months without their loved ones and friends who perished. We honour the towns people who have risen above the crippling loss of their magnificent town, despite their grief, determined that a new Marysville will rise from the ashes.

It is time also to thank the individuals, Churches and other organisations who have provided finance, goods, pastoral care, counselling, practical help and simple friendship. Churches both local and from further afield, have built fences, cut and delivered wood, helped construct buildings, organised activities, run seminars and conducted services

It is also time to remember that the days of grieving for many are not over. The moments of intense sadness and confusion still come.. The need for continuing prayer and loving help still exists. We have seen many demonstrations of the courage and compassion that Jesus sheds abroad in the hearts of His people and must continue to see the same over the next twelve months also.

*(By Graeme Cann, who with wife Julia lived in Marysville for 16 years and knew many of those who lost their lives on Black Saturday. They have assisted local churches by providing sessions on grief, depression and traumatic stress for the people of Marysville.)*



## WALLAN GATEWAY

One year on Wallan Gateway Church is looking forward to moving on with new vision. Over the past year a lot of time and energy of Andrew Adams, the minister and others has been taken up helping people, with over 45 families assisted. But with the New Year, they are looking forward to a new start and fresh focus.

One year on, we remember David Stokes one of the church's founding members who lost his life

# BUSHFIRE RECOVERY



in the events of Black Saturday. We pray for his family and friends, particularly his son Anthony, who also suffered significant loss to their farm and property, their shop is now up and running again.

One year on let us continue to pray with Wallan Gateway and those affected for the frustration surrounding rebuilding. Many people in their community continue to live in caravans, sheds and make shift housing. Building permits and processes are taking time, influenced by reviews and new recommendations some of which will take time to implement.

One year on as Wallan church has experienced so much, we pray for Andrew, the church leaders and congregation as they embrace a new chapter and continue to be God's light and hope to their community.

*Wallan Gateway Church*

## OPEN DOOR

### COMMUNITY CHURCH

What a year it has been! Monbulk Community Network (MCN), the community outreach arm of Open Door Community Church, alongside the whole Monbulk community has given and given and given again, and been the better for it. On the 7 February 2009, a day that made such an impact on so many lives, Monbulk in the Dandenongs no stranger to bushfires, Community Care Network was well situated to assist.

Immediately the shop became a collection and sorting point for all manner of items from clothes and toiletries, furniture and food as well as items for the RSPCA. Being a sorting and packing point every space was utilised, goods were also received by Safeway and boxes were prepared and labelled for collection by the Red Cross. As time went by and needs became and continue to be apparent, we place a sign of the need outside the shop and the need is met.

It was a time of partnership. Year 10 girls from Mountain District Christian School and Mater Christi came and helped in anyway they

could. The shop partnered with the Monbulk Branch of the Country Women's Association who took and packaged the toiletries into pamper packs for ladies, men, teens, fire-fighters and other support staff. More recently we partnered with St Vinies in Drouin to provide Christmas hampers.

Soon after the crisis we met the small Gippsland community of Labertouche – not so much a town, but a farming district just north of Princes Highway

There was no loss of life in Labertouche, but a lot of houses, sheds, equipment and fences, kilometres and kilometres of fences, and stock were effected. Some people suffered burns, particularly to their hands and feet. Like a lot of smaller towns, they felt swept aside and forgotten in al the hoo-ha of relief and media coverage. So our giving became concentrated on Labertouche while some of the guys from around Monbulk have assisted with fencing. It is much easier to give what people need than in general. More notices went up at the shop asking for specific things that were met with generous donation, and this continues, the goods, usually including pet food and tools, being delivered to Labertouche.

What a year it has been! We at MCN acknowledge the leading of our minister Brian Tunks who dared us to go out where there is a need

and do our best to meet that need. This attitude will serve us well in all our future endeavours.

*Open Door Community Church  
and the Monbulk Community Network  
PHOTOS INCLUDED*

**THANKYOU to Monique ten Hoopen,  
M&M Community Mission, for her  
work compiling these stories.**



## FROM THE VICTORIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES



### New Incident Coordination Centre

Convergence and confusion during last year's events has led to the implementation of new personal support coordination protocols by the Department of Human Services. As a part of the new arrangements the VCC has established and equipped an Incident Coordination Centre (ICC) in the Little Collins Street office.

#### VCC's New Contact Information

The Emergencies Ministry now has a dedicated phone number and email address:

9654 1736, [emergencies@vcc.org.au](mailto:emergencies@vcc.org.au)

State Coordinator:

Graeme Winterton, 0428 002 264,  
[winterton@datafast.net.au](mailto:winterton@datafast.net.au)

Assistant State Coordinator:

Stuart Stuart, 0407 212 438,  
[stutwo@aapt.net.au](mailto:stutwo@aapt.net.au)

*The Centre will be responsible to deploy and coordinate the response of the faith communities to emergency events.*

All chaplains and personal support workers as well as denominational involvement in the public sector will be administered

through the ICC. The centre will be staffed by representatives from VECN member churches and opened at the request of the DHS Emergency Coordination Centre. It has the ability to function upon a three shift twenty-four hour basis.

### The Victorian Emergency Chaplaincy Network (VECN)

The Central register of trained clergy and personal support workers continues to expand and presently numbers 1071 persons drawn from twenty-one faith communities.

#### Personnel

Additional funding provided by DHS has enabled the Emergencies Ministry to employ a part time office assistant to manage the database and assist with some office administration. Gemma Creegan is available on Mondays and Tuesdays and can be contacted via the dedicated Emergencies Ministry email and phone line.

**The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement has resources for communities and bushfire related groups and more:**  
[www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au)

#### Have you received your Photo ID card?

Some who have completed their Emergency Ministry training are yet to provide a jpeg photo or a copy of their police check or WWC document. ID cards cannot be issued until documentation is complete.

### 2010 EMERGENCY MINISTRY TRAINING DATES:

Level 1 Personal Support briefings for lay people will be conducted in the evening of the same day as Level 2 Chaplaincy briefings which are as follows:

- **FRANKSTON / MORN-INGTON** March 16
- **SHEPPARTON** March 23
- **WANGARATTA** April 20
- **FOOTSCRAY** May 11
- **BENDIGO** May 18
- **DANDENONG** June 10
- **BALLARAT** June 22
- **MELBOURNE** July 20

To register and for further information contact the VCC Emergencies Ministry office.



#### Victorian Bushfires: A Remembrance Service

The Victorian Council of Churches and Chair of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority writes to inform you of a service being held to remember the people and communities impacted by the Victorian bushfires of early 2009.

11.45am for 12 Noon sharp, Sunday 7 February 2010  
St. Paul's Cathedral  
Cnr Flinders and Swanston Streets,  
Melbourne

The service will be open to all Victorians and is timed to show support for recovering communities who will be reflecting in their own way at local events.