



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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Dear friends in Christ,

As the fires keep raging across the east and north east of Victoria and in other states, I invite us all to keep the people and communities of those regions in our minds, hearts and prayers.

Amidst the unprecedented intensity, velocity and destructive force of these fires, and the heartbreak they are bringing to so many, there have been messages and prayers of support, love and concern from across the life of the church.

These have come from the President of the Uniting Church, Dr. Deidre Palmer, from the Moderators of other Synods, some of whom are facing their own devastating bushfires, from the Moderator of the United Church of Canada, the World Methodist Council and even from the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches.

When one member of the body is suffering, the whole body suffers with it, as we care for one another. We keep in our prayers the communities of New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia currently facing fires, and those in Queensland so recently affected.

Together we are bringing our prayers and support for those who have died; for those who have lost loved ones, their homes and livelihoods, animals and pets; for those who don't know if loved ones are safe or not; for those who don't know if they have homes to go back to or what the future holds for them.

We are praying for those who are fighting the fires, risking their own lives, leaving behind family and work and forgoing income, out of a commitment to protect others and our unique bush land and wildlife.

We are praying for community leaders and the myriad of volunteers donating their time, money and goods to support firefighters and those in evacuation and relief centres.

We are grateful for the untiring dedication of those working behind the scenes in planning, logistics, supplies, transport, the Red Cross and other relief organisations.

We are grateful for those who are calming children, caring for vulnerable older ones, and supporting angry and distressed ones.

We are grateful for those who are caring for injured and homeless wildlife.

Human kindness is being seen all around, as people open their hearts and homes to give of their own possessions and time to support neighbours, friends and strangers. The generosity and hospitality of so many is astounding.

We are thankful for the care, concern, leadership and service being offered by VCCEM Emergency Chaplains, ministers, Uniting and Uniting AgeWell and so many members of our Church communities

in the middle of this crisis. They have brought spiritual and practical support and will continue to do so.

From news received so far, those of our Church communities in affected areas are safe, though some have suffered damage to properties and many have evacuated but situation is fast-changing.

As part of the Uniting Church response Uniting Vic/Tas is already engaged in many areas where the bushfires have struck and will continue be part of the response and recovery effort for the months ahead. To help meet gaps already identified and to enable longer term relief and recovery they have launched a Uniting Bushfire Appeal, which I urge you to support.

You can find the appeal at <https://www.vt.uniting.org/uniting-vic-tas-2020-bushfire-appeal/>

Brownyn Pike CEO of Uniting Vic/Tas said "As these local needs will be very different across the fire-affected areas and will continue to change, we are encouraging people to donate money that we can then use to quickly respond to whatever is needed.

The impact of these bushfires and the devastation they have caused will be felt in these communities for years. Uniting will be working locally with the community and closely with congregations and presbyteries in fire-affected areas to understand how best to serve these communities."

The Church is in the middle of the season of Christmas and Epiphany. It is at this time that we mark the visit of a few wise strangers who recognise Emmanuel, God-with-us, present in a vulnerable child, born into a situation of threat to human existence.

In these times, we are acutely aware of the very real threat to vulnerable communities and environments from the effects of climate change, not least through drought, extremes of weather and devastating bushfire.

As we tackle questions of climate change, we recognise the influence of our own human activity ... or inactivity. Amidst the threat to human life and to our unique environment and wildlife, may we see where God is with us in a different way of living: in generosity, hospitality and compassion for the people and world God loves.

May the God who walks with us, give us the strength, courage and hope we need, now and continuing over these coming days.

May the peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, fill your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Grace and Peace,



Rev Denise Liersch
Moderator