

Moderator's Pastoral Note - 8th January, 2015

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

This note is a follow up from the previous pastoral note regarding the bushfires in the Adelaide Hills. Thank you for your compassionate responses, messages of support and many offers to help those affected by these fires. We continue to pray for those who have lost homes and property, those still displaced from their homes, the firefighters, police, emergency service workers and those offering practical, pastoral and emotional support at this time.

We encourage congregations and faith communities to continue to pray and remember all those affected by the bushfires, as we gather for our worship services this weekend and in the coming weeks. We refer you to some excellent and varied resources for such circumstances which are freely available on the Assembly website [<http://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/disaster/item/517-list-of-materials-for-specific-times-of-disaster-and-hardship>]. Here you will find suggestions for prayers, liturgies and other creative worship ideas suitable to be used or adapted in times of disaster and hardship.

If you or your congregation would like to make a financial donation through the Uniting Church in South Australia, this can now be done through the Uniting Church SA website [<http://sa.uca.org.au/pastoral-relations/uniting-church-sa-relief-fund>]. Funds given in this way will be available to help congregations support those affected in their local community through the provision of chaplaincy, extra pastoral support, special events to assist in recovery or practical help in a myriad of ways. Your donation will assist these congregations to actively demonstrate God's compassion, comfort and hope to people who are experiencing distress as a result of this disaster. Click here [<http://sa.uca.org.au/pastoral-relations/uniting-church-sa-relief-fund>] to learn more about Bushfire Relief SA and to donate.

As the recovery phase begins, there will be many opportunities to give practical assistance. You can donate through the CFS and other similar agencies. The Adelaide Fires 2015 Facebook [<https://www.facebook.com/AdelaideFires2015>] page is continually updated with lists of needs, drop-off centres etc. Please note that it is always better to donate money, rather than goods, through a reputable agency so that this can be given to the affected families and spent in their local communities. We encourage people to partner with Blaze Aid [<http://blazeaid.com/>], if you have the skills and time to help with rebuilding of fences and other structures damaged or destroyed by fire, or with other community groups and service clubs who will be actively involved in recovery efforts. The SA Government Bushfire Recovery website [<http://www.sa.gov.au/topics/emergencies-and-safety/south-australian-bushfire-recovery>] lists ways you can help by donations of feed for animals etc. More details can be found on their website [<http://www.sa.gov.au/topics/emergencies-and-safety/south-australian-bushfire-recovery>].

The Uniting Church is responsible for the ecumenical Disaster and Recovery Ministries in SA. The church trains and deploys a team of chaplains (lay and ordained from all denominations) who provide pastoral and spiritual support to the broader community in times of disaster such as this. At the invitation of the SA Government through Housing SA, these chaplains are called to exercise this important ministry in Emergency Relief and Recovery Centres and through Impact Assessment teams visiting affected people in their homes. Our teams are currently active in such Centres and there will be ongoing ministry in the weeks and even months to come. In addition people from several Uniting Church congregations have been providing pastoral support in a variety of circumstances and venues – thank you to all of you!

Next week, we have invited representatives from our Hills congregations and those congregations close by who've also been affected, to have a conversation about how we can respond together in ways which will provide care for our neighbours and serve our broader community. We are hopeful that this will be a step towards some significant partnerships, which may assist individuals and communities in their recovery and rebuilding from this tragic event.

In this time of deep distress for many people in our South Australian community, we have also witnessed enormous courage and selfless service, particularly from the CFS, other emergency workers and volunteers. We have been encouraged by stories of people's kindness and generosity to one another.

We pray God will continue to bring comfort and strength to all those affected.

Yours in Christ

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