



Catholic Diocese of Sale

Vicar General's Office

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9th January 2020

Pastoral Letter to Parish and School Communities

East Gippsland Bushfires Response

We are very aware of the immense suffering and loss which has occurred as a result of the bushfires in East Gippsland, the Eastern Mission of our Diocese, over the New Year period.

With lives, homes, livelihoods, stock, and wildlife lost through this natural disaster, our hearts go out to all who are suffering.

We acknowledge the significant work of all involved in the on-going fire fight and the relief and recovery process.

The efforts of the local fire brigades have been heroic and the support by all the other organisations, government and volunteer, has been enormous and somewhat unprecedented.

Our priority is supporting the East Gippsland communities directly affected and working with local authorities, particularly through Vinnies and CatholicCare, in partnership with other agencies, for the long term.

Vicar General, Rev Peter Slater visited the Bairnsdale Relief Centre this week. Fr Michael Willemsen, Parish Priest for the Parishes of Orbost, Lakes Entrance and Bairnsdale, has been at the Bairnsdale Relief Centre over much of the last week, supported by his parish teams. These Parishes' territories include seriously impacted communities such as Mallacoota, Buchan, Cann River, Sarsfield, Nowa Nowa and Omeo.

Members of these East Gippsland Parishes are heavily involved in the fire fight and recovery and have assisted in many ways including welcoming the displaced into their homes.

The Diocese of Sale Catholic Education Office (CEOSale) is working directly with School communities, through School Principals, in the affected areas to ensure supports are in place for school families who may have been impacted as they prepare to return for the new school year.

Director of Catholic Education, Maria Kirkwood, has specifically noted the need for ongoing support, beyond the initial crisis period, for families and school community members who may have been impacted. Senior staff of CEOSale are communicating directly with the Victorian Department of Education to ensure a coordinated response to schools and school communities.

To date, thankfully, we have not lost any parish or school buildings to the fires.

Fr Slater noted that God's love and care has been shown through the outpouring of support through the actions of local community members, emergency responders from across Australia, and indeed worldwide support, towards those who need assistance at this time.

Many of those impacted are visitors to the Diocese who will return home after a traumatic experience; we pray for them as they begin an unexpected recovery journey.

Those wishing to donate money for the relief and recovery in East Gippsland are encouraged to donate to Vinnies and Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund (GERF), as these two organisations are in a position to provide timely support where it is most needed. (See links below)

Parishes across the Diocese, not impacted by this event, are encouraged to take up a collection directed to these two charities at all weekend Masses, on at least one occasion, between now and Australia Day.

We continue to pray for the safety of those continuing to fight the fires and for all those affected as they are supported through their journey of recovery.

Yours in Christ,



Rev Fr. Peter Slater
Vicar General
Catholic Diocese of Sale



Ms Maria Kirkwood
Chief Executive Officer
Diocese of Sale Catholic Education Ltd

Vinnies Victoria Bushfire Appeal: <https://donate.vinnies.org.au/appeals-vic/vinnies-nsw-bushfire-appeal-vic>

Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund <https://www.gerf.org.au/donate/>