

VIEWPOINT

Volume 3 Issue 1 Autumn 2020

A quarterly magazine of The Canberra Region Presbytery of The Uniting Church in Australia

LINKS - see online copy at canberra.uca.org.au under Presbytery News

How we are responding to the Gospel call to follow Jesus ♦ What Ministry Agents want to say to the Church



Recovery and renewal

on page 20

**Where is God, in the fires?
Stories from the firefront told by church
members and Disaster Recovery chaplains.
Who wants to become an ordained minister?**





Dennis Martin (left) and Rev Kerry Bartlett present the elements.
Image: Jenny Rowland

Inductions

and comings and goings in the office

New Presbytery Ministers

John Squires and Andrew Smith, inducted 21 February 2020

Congratulations and welcome to **Rev Andrew Smith** and **Rev Dr John Squires** as they embark on a new chapter in their ministry among us.

Presbytery thanks Canberra City Uniting Church for their hospitality and for leading us in worship - it was very much appreciated. Thanks are also extended to the huge efforts by many people in keeping the service running smoothly, speaking from the front, setting up and packing up.

*John Williams, Delia Quigley, Judy McKinlay
Presbytery Co-Chairs*

Inducted into roles of leadership in our shared congregational life.

The President of the National Assembly, **Dr Deidre Palmer**, preached a thoughtful and stirring sermon. She focussed on the call to serve embedded in Luke 4:16-30 and the prayer of hope expressed in Psalm 13. **John Squires**

As Presbytery Minister, Congregation Futures, Andrew will work with Congregations and Faith Communities, Pastors and Ministers, to empower their spiritual life, develop missional capacity, strengthen missional leadership, and build strong missional networks across the region.

Extract from Andrew's response to Deidre's message: The Service of Induction signals a new stage in the team ministry of the Presbytery staff and office bearers as John Squires and I get started together full time with the team. I am looking forward to ministering closely with John as we serve with you as Presbytery Ministers across the Canberra Region. In the coming years I'm keen to join with you in discerning how the Holy Spirit is moving to empower your witness in word and action as part of Christ reaching out to 'command attention and awaken faith' (Basis of Union para. 4).

As Presbytery Minister, Wellbeing, John will work with Ministers and Pastors, Congregations and Faith Communities, to guide them in their development and growth and support their leadership in their communities. John is charged to provide pastoral care, leadership development, and other training. There is a significant administrative component in the position.



Extract from John's response to Deidre's message: "I am grateful for the support and encouragement that I have received as I have undertaken the slow and extended process, over the last year, of working my way into this role of Wellbeing within your Presbytery. I come with a commitment to support and serve the leadership of our 29 congregations, both lay and ordained; to equip and encourage the whole people of God in order that together we might be faithful followers of Jesus; and to work to strengthen the mission and ministry that is undertaken by our congregations and faith communities - the lifeblood of the Gospel in our region. I am looking forward to working with you all and especially to work closely with Andrew.

*(Includes excerpts from John's blog: An Informed Faith
<https://johntsquires.com/2020/02/22/this-is-the-world-we-live-in-this-is-the-gospel-we-believe-in/>)*

Delia Quigley completes her time as Co-Chair Canberra Region Presbytery and during the past week began her journey of formation as a candidate for ministry in the Uniting Church. Delia will be greatly missed in her Co-Chair role into which she brought a broad range of valuable skills and experience after 31 years in policing locally, nationally and importantly with the United Nations Peacekeeping missions in Timor, Cyprus, Sudan, and Timor-Leste.



Delia is a calm spirit with lovely listening and management skills. Behind the scenes Delia worked quietly and very efficiently keeping the wheels of Presbytery turning smoothly over this period of transition. I found it was so good to be part of the Co-chair team with her. I think we complemented each other well ... and it was fun. Over this Black Summer of Bushfires Delia and I worked seamlessly to keep information and encouragement flowing through Facebook and Email. So as Delia takes up her studies and formation in the ministry of Jesus the Christ, I know we stand with her in prayer and thank her for all the work she did to lead us so well. Thank you Delia.

John Williams, Co-Chair, Canberra Region Presbytery



Andrew Smith reflects

The manse that my family is living in is situated on the rise of Mount Taylor in Pearce, ACT. Since moving in mid-January we have taken many walks up and down the mountain, in part to be exercising our 1-year old Border Collie. During the heat of January and February you can imagine how dry and barren the mountain looked. Locals had placed out water supplies, vegetables and hay for the wildlife in the absence of any natural sources.

After recent rain in Canberra I was surprised and delighted to see green springing up across the mountain. Plants that seemed browned off and barely hanging on to life began to show new green shoots. Paths that were rocks and dust became a patchwork of green carpet. Who would have thought that such life was lying asleep in dry sticks and dust?

My thoughts around what I was seeing brought to mind a part of the [Basis of Union](#) of which I have become particularly fond. It is in paragraph 4 and goes like this: "Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command attention and awaken faith".

I find it powerfully hopeful that as we look at our local communities, we can be expectant of faith lying asleep in unexpected people. Even more, we can be expectant that in the power of the Holy Spirit our Lord Jesus Christ will use our witness in word and action - however strong or weak we think it is - to awaken that faith - green shoots in a browned-off land!

I have another reminder of this hope on the doorstep to the manse.



The railing to the front veranda is covered by a grape vine. For much of our first month in the manse this grapevine was giving off signs that it was autumn - deep purple leaves, ready to turn brown and drop off. But with the rain, new green leaves have begun to grow. It seems like new growth out of season. It seems like unexpected life. It seems like the branches have woken up.

One of the principles for the future directions of our Presbytery is to "stimulate and encourage congregations in prayerful discernment of the signs of the Spirit among them and to act on that calling". I'm keen to join with you in discerning how the Holy Spirit is moving to empower your witness in word and action as part of Christ reaching out to command attention and awaken faith. Like green shoots on an autumn grapevine.

Andrew Smith

Presbytery Minister, Congregation Futures



We are indebted - thanks Bri

Briony Griffiths, well known and loved across the Presbytery because of her sterling work connecting congregation with Uniting over the past seven years will be taking up a new position with Human Service in the ACT government from the beginning of March. Briony has walked alongside many of our congregations offering encouragement, insights and a means of connecting so as to provide support to community service activities, and social justice campaigns with Uniting and with the Synod. She has been a very active energetic associate member of Presbytery, walking the second mile as a wonderfully supportive member of the Presbytery staff team.



Briony in many ways pioneered the means by which congregations and presbytery activity could be connected to Uniting and Synod activities and initiatives and brought alive. Her work with communities of the inner north congregation is just one example. As she leaves us Briony has acknowledged and appreciated the learning, opportunities and relationships she has been afforded during her time with the Uniting Church. In the same way we are indebted to Briony for her commitment, and the dedicated energy she gave to the development of new ways to be the whole church where Congregations, Uniting, Presbytery and Synod worked as one. So while we are sad to see Briony leave us after all this time, we send her with our blessing, our thanks and our prayers as she moves to new things and new opportunities with Canberra communities. We know Briony will make a difference.

John, Judy and Delia, Presbytery Co-Chairs, Canberra Region Presbytery

STORIES from the firefront

Bateman's Bay

6.00am Tuesday 31 December 2019

We were woken by a Rural Fire Service (RFS) message to evacuate as the fires were approaching. After packing and filling the gutters with water we left for the evacuation centre at Hanging Rock. We parked on the soccer fields and watched as the helicopter kept coming to fill up with water from the beach, at an alarming rate. He stopped to drop two bucket loads on a spot fire on the opposite side of the footy oval. Then quickly went back to his work, returning to fill up again, disappearing into thick smoke every couple of minutes.

Evacuation Centre overflowing

After a couple of hours, I went to register our family and they were announcing to the multitude assembled, that they were just waiting on keys for the basketball courts for the overflow of people. I informed the lady taking my details that I had keys for the Uniting Church if that building could be of use. The organisers were only too happy to have another building to shelter people in.

11am Church shelters 100 and many dogs

At 11am I opened up the church and woke poor Andy up who had been working at the Evacuation Centre all night and had only put his head down for a nap at 9.30am!! Sorry Andy. I rang Terence to inform him the church was being used. People started to arrive with their pets, mostly dogs. Soon we had close to 100 people and about 40 dogs and I understand a birdcage as well (though I didn't see it) and a few church folk. Every pew was full as was the foyer, sanctuary and kids corner. We only had biscuits to offer and while the power was on, a cuppa.



"The paddock next to our home when we returned 7pm 31st Dec. Two of our side fences were burnt. Our neighbour's caravan, chook shed, shed and fences were burnt. A house across the road was destroyed. Another adjoining vacant block had a boat and storage container destroyed."
Pamela Nuessler.



Hanging Rock Evacuation Centre about 9.30am 31st December 2019 Bateman's Bay.

Tuesday lunchtime - darkness

At roughly 12-1pm it went awfully dark. The sky was black and orange. Many folk were crying. Some had lost their home that morning and only had what they were wearing. A few candles were lit on the kitchen servery. Though with the fire outside I dreaded having candles lit. The smoke was very thick and filtered into the building.

2pm - food

After the sky started to clear a bit, approximately 2pm, I rang the Evacuation Centre for some food as most people hadn't eaten all day. Some folk left to find food themselves. We had two lovely Irish families who were holidaying together. The men walked over to the centre and brought back cheese rolls and banana rolls and apples. Around 5pm most people had returned. We had about 25 left and again the Irish gentlemen went for food.

The beautiful Greek Community had donated their New Year's Eve celebration dinner to the Evacuation Centre so we dined on lamb kebabs, salad and crusty bread. The Irish families had found motel accommodation so I was left with six people to sleep the night. We pushed pews together to make beds.

Disaster Manager calls

The newly arrived Disaster Manager, Aimee, from Sydney called on us to introduce herself and see how we were going. As there was no power we bedded down early. Around 10pm, three others arrived including a Japanese backpacker.

Wednesday - New Year's Day

By 7am, as there was no food or power, all had left, either for home or the evacuation centre. Aimee arrived as I was packing up the remaining food to take back to the main centre. As the weekend was predicted to be as bad she asked if the church could be used again, which I assured her it could be.

The loss and trauma suffered in the fires is many faceted. If someone wants to tell you their story please sit and listen to them. For it is in the retelling, sometimes many, many times to many people, that we can process what has happened and start to deal with it. Never think a listening ear is of no value or a waste of time. Actually it is vital for the healing of our community.

Trevor Kohlhagen, Bateman's Bay UC.



Rev Yvonne Stevenson led prayers of thanks on Sunday in candle light due to no power. Without power for two weeks, my battery radio was invaluable as our only source for getting news of the fires' whereabouts. Harvey Norman's store in the Bay provided free charging for mobile phones which was very much appreciated. Pam Nuessler.

Friday 3rd January lunch time

Aimee (Disaster Manager) rang to inform me she planned to use the church for people with sensory needs. At 3.30 Bev, Fay and I set up. People started arriving at 5pm. 14 slept overnight Friday.

Saturday 4th January - no power

During Saturday we had up to 40 people and 34 of them slept overnight. Thankfully it was not as bad in Batemans Bay as predicted. Andy and I went to collect meals. Lunch was meat patty between bread with salad and tea was chicken wings and kebabs, salad. Breakfast was bread and spreads from the fridge and some people had brought cereal.

Power went off early Saturday morning. We had been able to have lights on Friday night, for all the night trips to the toilets. Saturday night the Evac Centre had loaned us some lanterns. However the batteries did not last the night. At least this time I remembered to pack a torch.

Housing families, a rabbit, dogs, cats, lizards, chooks and a crowing rooster

One squash court housed Josh, who was autistic, his two sisters, mum, nan and pop, six cats, two dogs and two lizards. They had airbeds. In the meeting room was Suzy an 11 year old girl in a water chair bed, her mum and nan.

"My husband and I evacuated on the 3rd January and slept in our Station Wagon on the Church grounds on the night of the 3rd with our dogs, Bonnie and Clyde (right), who were just happy to be wherever we were. 4th Jan: I slept on the church pews - serviceable beds for many evacuees.

Church members worked tirelessly to ensure everyone's comfort, willing and dedicated to making all evacuees feel welcome and supported. Pam Nuessler.

Her uncle and aunt were with us during the day. They had two dogs and cats and a rabbit. A lot of equipment was needed which her uncle and mum brought down over two trips on the Friday evening. Her mum said Suzy had not smiled so much in a 24 hour period before. It was like a holiday for her with congregation members giving her lots of love and attention. The church pews were again used for us oldies.

Billy tea and (cold) showers

On the Saturday night when we were collecting the tea, I invited my friend with her five chooks to join us. Cedric the rooster crowed at 5.30am although most of us were already up, as there were a couple of noisy snorers. My friends also had a gas stove and billy and provided cuppas Saturday night and Sunday morning which were much appreciated. Cold showers were enjoyed/endured over the weekend.

Sunday 5th January - prayer, stories.

For Sunday worship 30 people gathered around the tables in the foyer with the Christ candle and Rev Yvonne led us in prayer. Experiences/stories were shared. I closed up about 2pm after Suzy's family had removed all her equipment.

We were well attended to spiritually by Rev Yvonne and the chaplains once they arrived. And the Evacuation Centre staff called on us twice a day.

Since then Suzy's family have donated \$200 and we have purchased our own gas stove, billy and pan. Just need a small gas bottle. So, we will be better prepared next time!

Chris McCaul
Bateman's Bay Congregation

Photos courtesy of Pamela Nuessler, a member of the congregation.



STORIES from the firefront

Braidwood

The first threat of fire came to Braidwood in late November. The town was locked down and evacuation centres set up. Like so many fire affected areas this summer, the fire threatened, the threat eased, and the fire threatened again. We got familiar with cycles of suspense and menace, and the weeks of smoke and burnt leaves scattered across the lawn constantly reminded us of our vulnerability.

What difference did faith make?

We, the Uniting Church, are a community built on the mystery of faith, hope and love: sometimes sure, sometimes questioning, but always within the hand of the "I Am."

It is this mystery that the congregation of St Andrews takes into the everyday life of this community. Many years of loyal investment in groups and service clubs have taken this faith, hope and love into the very fibers of this town.

When disaster threatened God was present, through His people, in the RFS, in the service clubs, in the CWA, and over a beer at the bar, bringing practical service, compassion, and consolation founded on an understanding that what we "see" and "know" is not all there is. We do not live as those who have no hope, even when we do not understand.

Where was God in the hard times?

Same place He was in the good times, when He celebrated with us: shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart; in us and around us whether we are aware of Him or not. When Job queries God in the face of tragedy, two questions are posed: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2), and "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:4).

Life is a gift

We only ever speak with partial knowledge, we see dimly and with bias. These questions are not about asserting sovereignty, or bringing accusation, but rather they alert Job to what he may have lost sight of in the disaster, the gift of life. Understandably, in the midst of his pain, Job may have temporarily lost sight of the profound mysterious deep truth that life is a gift. The main thing is we are alive and safe" echoed across the fire grounds as people told their stories.

We exist for we have been invited to participate in the mystery of being, because God wanted us here and now.

What do we bring to these challenging times?

Faith, hope and love wrapped up in deep, compassionate listening, quiet, peaceful presence, and self-care that validates our mystery while mentoring freedom for others, and prayer – conversation in relationship with the Eternal God.

What amazing strengths we have for such a time as this. "Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you" (Deut. 31:6).

Brian Carle, Church Council Chair and Dr Julie Fletcher, Pastor - Braidwood Congregation

Bodalla

Though fires continue to burn close to Bodalla on various sides, but especially close to the east and north, the better conditions today (24 January) allow for a brief moment of reflection.

The bare facts for our community (Bodalla and its small hinterland) over 24 days are that three people are confirmed to have lost their lives; about 60 properties (my own estimate) have been lost; forests and the species living in them have been devastated; and hundreds have been supported through a concerted relief effort. This is a community in which so many people know so many other people - so the events have touched everyone in some way.

People around here are some combination of very busy, exhausted (physically and/or mentally-emotionally), and not quite sure what to do with their next hour or the rest of the day or their coming week. Plans go out the window at this time because people feel they are so subject to forces beyond their control. Yesterday threw many, as there was no gradation of warnings before people suddenly received a text saying it was "too late to leave; take shelter as the fire approaches", and those who chose to get out quickly anyway to a nearby centre found that the evacuation centre was no longer an evacuation centre.

The circumstances have accentuated the very best in almost everyone.



"It is now, as ever, that the longstanding connections and compassionate relationships that Christian communities have built, come into their own".

Pam Skelton, DCRN chaplain and at St Georges Uniting Church, Eden - see page 17

Some people have shown unexpected attractive traits that appear only under stress (and/or some unattractive ones too). Some have surprised by emerging as leaders or as volunteers that no-one knew.

Most seem to have become deeply grateful to others around them and to people from elsewhere (fire brigades from hundreds of kms away; donors; their neighbours; many others). Most have formed new and deeper relationships across the community. Almost everyone has discovered something profoundly important about community in general, and this community in particular, that normally would take decades of "normal" existence to learn - or would never be learned.

That's not to say that these bushfires are in any way a good thing. They are huge, terrible, scary, devastating locally and devastating globally. I hope that the wider community, in which we all participate, gains the insight and combined will to tackle the causes before there are too many other events just like this one.

Michael Brown

Bodalla Congregation, Mt Dromedary Parish

Alpine

It's been all hands on deck for the Alpine Church and it's Volunteers following the fires which effectively isolated the local Snowy Mountain community both physically and economically.

No tourists because of the fire emergency meant no income for the businesses and high country resorts.

With most businesses down on summer trading by 70 to 80% the situation socially and economically has quickly deteriorated around Jindabyne.

The Op Shop and it's Food Pantry has proven to be a light on the hill for the local folk. Alpine reports they are spending over \$ 1,000 dollars a week now restocking their food pantry. Food insecurity has affected all social levels and our church representatives report they are aware they now have quite a few families living off Christ's generosity.

The vision for the Alpine Uniting Church Op Shop this year is "inside of you is a heart full of dreams, and inside every one of your dreams is hope".

Debbie Wilson from the Alpine reflects that this vision has impacted many already this year as the generosity and kindness of the Alpine has kept hope alive for hundreds. The Alpine Church Council has been impacted by the enormous community grief and insecurity arising from the ashes of the fire emergency.

They have enlisted help for the community exploring grief and trauma counselling with a local Christian professional who has agreed to attend the Op Shop and Community Meals as a presence of Christ in the midst of a busy marketplace.

Debbie Wilson

Alpine Congregation

Eden, Bega, Merimbula



The following is an extract from "Chaplain at the gate of Eden", NSW Synod's online INSIGHTS article

<https://www.insights.uca.org.au/chaplain-at-the-gate-in-eden/>

Steph O'Connell interviews Chaplain, Rev Ian Diamond who arrived in Merimbula on the Friday with Rev Karyl Davison.

Thursday, 9 January 2020

Ian Diamond: "We had supplies for Bega and Eden from [Co-Chair] John Williams, in Canberra.

In particular, he sent a generator (see above) for the community's use," Ian said.

Stephen Faggotter, a member of the Eden Uniting Church, stayed to defend his [Kiah] property when the area evacuated to safety. His house was saved with minor damage which, he says, no one can explain.

After the devastation of Kiah, Ian met Stephen in Eden. Stephen became a proud user of the generator supplied by Canberra Region Presbytery.

"Since the fire we've had no power or safe water so the generator has been an absolute Godsend," said Stephen. "I want to thank everyone who has prayed and thank the wider Church for their concern and active support of so many who have been affected by this ordeal. It has certainly been good to talk to Ian and to receive pastoral care from those who understand what it's like or can empathise with others. I can't thank them enough."



THE FIRES - letters and updates sent throughout the bushfire crisis

Throughout the bushfire crisis, letters and updates were being sent by Presbytery Co-Chair John Williams, on behalf of the Co-Chairs, daily, weekly, to Presbytery leadership across the congregations, particularly those being affected by fire. These extracts serve to provide an overview of that time.

Advent 2019

We see hot, very dry conditions, water shortages, bush fires, smoke pollution and ash falling from the sky. An apocalyptic vision of what is in store in the now not-so-lucky country?

The Christmas story tells of a God of Love who became one with us.

- Suffering with us, struggling with us, fleeing with us, hiding with us, hurting with us.
- Confronting sin with us, overcoming hatred with us, achieving freedom with us, living with us, loving with us, celebrating with us.
- He came as a servant king.
- God pitched his tent with us

31 Dec 2019

Canberra Region Presbytery are deeply saddened by the loss of lives at Cobargo this afternoon and injuries to others, along with the further loss of homes, businesses, property and creatures across the South Coast.

We have been in contact throughout the day with Stephen Robinson the Coordinator of the Disaster Recovery Chaplains, and many of those providing Chaplaincy support across evacuation centres and to a number of congregations.

As there may be the possibility that we cannot provide physical support for some days we thought that we could undertake spiritual and prayer support for the coming days.

We have created a 24/7 Prayer roster to provide coverage for the next 5 days. We attach a pastoral letter from Simon Hansford our NSW Synod Moderator. Please circulate - many on the South Coast will be without communications coverage such as mobile phones this evening.

We stand together in faith, hope and in prayer for those who this evening and in the coming days will be in distress and despair.

Fri Jan 3

in it all God is with us and came to dwell with us.

Tonight we are very conscious that many of our communities are facing awful times of dislocation, uprooting, fleeing to safer places.

Others sit, grieve in the ashes and walk from a home destroyed. Others sit on beaches, very still in clusters with face buried in wet towels. Others gather in evacuation centres, others offer services, comfort and care, while our firefighters on the ground and in the air continue the relentless battle to contain and the unpredictable blaze and the new form of the fire.



Clockwise. DRCN Co-ordinator Stephen Robinson with Disaster Chaplains: Revs. Ian Diamond, Julie Fletcher, Heather Potter, Daniel Mossfield, Michael Palmer, David Russell, Susan Cann, Pam Skelton, Yvonne Stephenson, Karyl Davison, Terence Corkin.

To provide Chaplaincy support at evacuation centres Stephen Robinson has marshalled a team from Presbytery to provide a listening ear, simple actions of care, loan of a mobile, offer a cuppa and most importantly just standing with distressed families and dislocated people.

We have Pam Skelton in Eden, David Russell and Susan Cann at Merimbula and Bega, Terence Corkin at Moruya and Yvonne Stephenson at Batemans Bay. Karyl Davison and Ian Diamond travelled down early this morning to boost our support to our coastal evacuation centres.

Meanwhile Daniel Mossfield has been working at Goulburn since Monday and both Julie and Neil Fletcher have a long period of work of compassion and care with continuing fires around Braidwood.

In addition there are many congregation leaders such as Di White and the Narooma people who are actively working to support the needs of their community thru this time.

I know we all want to do something and we can.....

First prayer is so important. Please Pray.

As Bushfires Continue to rage - we pray and affirm that - in it all, God is with us.

January 5 at 1.55am

Tonight Eden and surrounding communities were evacuated to Merimbula and Bega and Ian Diamond travelled on the buses transporting people and pets to these locations. Pam Skelton, David Russell, and Karyl Davison continue to minister in Eden, Merimbula, Bega which at the moment is a major evacuation centre. It was good news that Kath Merrifield and Ray Lemon arrived at Batemans Bay on behalf of Disaster Recovery Chaplains Network (DCRN) and were able to connect up and support the sterling work of Yvonne Stephenson.

The people of the Bateman's Bay church are doing an amazing job supporting people and offering the church as a place of refuge. Terence Corkin continues his ministries and valuable information flows from Moruya.

People and communities really appreciate prayer as expressed by Kath Crapp from Narooma. People feel supported to know you are praying for them in these awful circumstances. Please keep up your prayers and at worship services tomorrow maybe a special time of prayer would be greatly valued.

Deidre Palmer, our Assembly President wrote to us "Thank you for the pastoral ministry of the Canberra Region Presbytery in response to the bushfire crisis. You are all very much in my prayers. Thank you for sharing the pastoral letter that we received today from the World Council of Churches. We have pastoral messages from the Moderators of Queensland, NSW/ACT, Victoria/Tasmania and South Australia. Please let me know if there is anything I can do ...

Rachel Norris of South Coast Lifeline emailed to say "We are thinking of you and the communities who are affected at this time by the awful bushfires ... We want you to know we are with you and you are in my thoughts and prayers."

While it is very distressing as we write this to know that many communities are faced with flames and extremely threatening situations it is good to learn that the threat to the town of Jindabyne has eased right off tonight. As Sunday comes now please take the need for prayer seriously and give reflection, meditation and prayer a special time and place tomorrow. A lot of hard times lie ahead and now it is just awful... but we are a people of hope because we are loved and our loving God sits with us as we weep and lament.

Blessings in the midst of these times will be unexpected and quite wonderful. **We pray and affirm that - in it all, God is with us.**

January 5 at 11.12pm

It seems that over much of the Presbytery conditions are easing but Eden is very much under threat while more than 150 fires still burn in NSW.

There is some good news as temperatures drop and light rain has fallen in coastal locations and in the southern highlands ...

Today Kath Merrifield at Bateman's Bay suggests

Rev Terence Corkin - DRCN Chaplain: "You meet people at their point of need, they set the agenda - I don't go in saying, 'now, how can I get God into the conversation?'" Rev Corkin said. However he said some people were asking, "what is the foundation of my life if I lose everything?" SBS NEWS online



perhaps up to 5000 folk have been at evacuation centres including Malua Bay beach. Kath will stay next two days. Numbers fluctuate.

Many acts of kindness and generosity characterise the mood and our local congregation is providing food, sleeping space and many cuppas. Fires are still active north and south of Batemans Bay and power has been out over much of the last days.

Meanwhile Daniel Mossfield has been at Goulburn centre in the showgrounds. It has been a very busy morning with Bundanoon fires developing and causing evacuation of various small towns in southern highlands. Animals are sheltering at the showground in large numbers. Looking after pets at evacuation centres is causing some concerns.

Michael Palmer at Eden stayed after its evacuation to Merimbula and Bega with Pam and Peter Skelton and spent a long night working and worrying to make dwellings safe. Eden is still under threat although light rain has fallen. Please continue to pray for Eden, for all who are fighting this enormous fire and for the hinterland. **Worship was cancelled.** Instead Michael sent the worship material to folk and opened his home to meet with folk over a cuppa, prayer and conversation. He went to folk staying and ministered where they sheltered. Michael says folk also gather at the church and hall for support food and cuppa.

... continued over

THE FIRES - letters and updates sent throughout the bushfire crisis

Continued from previous page

Quite a few dislocated people need ministry as they could not leave for lack of fuel or funds or chose not to leave. With the evacuation of Eden to three centres in Merimbula, **David Russell** has ministered to 1000 people at the Sapphire Club, **Karyl Davison** worked long shifts at the RSL club which catered for 400.

Ian Diamond continued at the **Tara Beach** Country club where about 300-400 were sheltering with 60-70 pets ranging from dogs and cats to goldfish. Most evacuation centres do not accept pets. Ian played a key role in securing the arrangements for folk evacuated with pets.

At **Moruya**, **Terence Corkin** reports that threats of fire have reduced The power is back on but fine ash is over everything with lots of smoke in the south and east. People remain vigilant.

So many other communities have suffered devastating losses and the risks remain high. Large numbers of families have lost their homes, belongings, their business and their livelihoods.

The recovery of these communities will be long and demanding. Our commitment is for the long term.

Tues Jan 7 - God is with us

We have had two days of lower temperatures, some scattered rain, and clearer air although smoke haze continues. People are tired and exhausted and thankful for the pause, weird though it feels.

Folk are returning home from these places but so many are dislocated, grieving, hurting, very distressed, trying desperately to be courageous ...

Presbytery Minister, John Squires has written us a pastoral letter which calls us to sit and be gentle with each other, to sit and listen to the stories.

In our stories perhaps we will slowly find the strengths we need.

We are in a pause...folk are very tired...yet tomorrow and then Friday are predicted to be a return of the conditions of last Saturday. Will it ever end.

Our chaplaincy team (Pam Skelton at **Eden**, Ian Diamond at **Quaama**, David Russell in **Merimbula**, Karyl at **Cobargo**, Terence Corkin at **Moruya**, Kath Merrifield at **Batemans Bay** and Daniel Mossfield at **Goulburn**) and members of our congregations tell stories of folk who are kind, generous and compassionate, though often grieving.

Bateman's Bay and **Narooma** - a number of **homeless men**, sleeping in swags and old vans in Church carparks, **have become the hands, heart and feet** that clean toilets, wash dishes, clear gutters and are the protectors of church property and drop in centres. In **Narooma**, **Monty's kitchen** continues to provide meals to the evacuation centre and the buildings are distribution points for food, clothing.

Yvonne Stevenson tells of a **Sydney Uniting church sending \$2000** to the Bateman's Bay Congregation so they could offer cash vouchers.

In Eden, **Michael Palmer** stayed on after evacuation and sat with folk who just had no means to move. Today they indicated how good it was to see his face again and to know he stood with them on the edge surrounded by anxiety and uncertainty.

As we think of what we might do...

We in the UCA are small and we could think that against of the huge resources of government and wealth of the private sector we can do little.

But support for the **Moderators fund** is a way to make a huge difference in the longer term recovery. <https://nswact.uca.org.au/about-us/giving/moderators-appeal>

May you find Blessing in unexpected ways.

9 January 10.31pm

It's Thursday Night and we sit in a weird calm with slowly burning fires on many fronts and perhaps ask "How long O Lord?"

17 January 3.40pm

The rain is coming, falling, but bushfires still burn while communities find ways to share pain, joy, compassion and contemplate recovery.

We have been blessed with messages and care.

A **shared Pastoral Statement on the Australian Bushfire Crisis** from the UCA President and all our Synod Moderators.

<https://assembly.uca.org.au/news/item/3112-shared-pastoral-statement-from-uca-president-and-moderators-australian-bushfire-crisis>



19 January 10.11pm

Lutheran songwriter, Dr Robin Mann, has written two new verses for one of his best-known songs, 'Comfort, comfort'. They may be used free of charge as a prayer and worship resource. <https://www.lca.org.au/comfort-comfort-robin-mann-writes-two-fire-verses/>

31 January 11.31pm

It's back again - Bushfire Emergency and 40C + heat just when some fire impacted communities contemplate recovery.

During this week the Moderator, **Simon Hansford**, Disaster Chaplain **Stephen Robinson**, Presbytery Co-Chairs and members of Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) visited fire affected areas of the South Coast of NSW.

Meetings were held in Bateman's Bay, Narooma, Cobargo, Merimbula and Eden. Representatives from each Uniting Church attended each meeting, as well as members of other churches and from the wider community. **We are most grateful to the folk who made this visit possible.**

Our deep gratitude goes to Terence Corkin and Yvonne Stevenson at Batemans Bay, to Di White at Narooma and Cobargo, to David Russell at Merimbula and to the Eden team of Michael Palmer and Pam Skelton.

The conversations were open and honest and a significant number of participants related their personal experiences of the fires. **Our heads are spinning** with many ways we could respond. The PRC working group will bring a report together in the next week. [See page 20]

As we sit and contemplate strategy and the actions ahead... this night is hot and tomorrow with 40C heat the fires threaten once again. To oscillate between beginning recovery and being thrust back to fire emergency is awful. But we hold once again that amid such suffering, God is with us. We hold to that.

9 February at 11.09pm

What a blessing as the rain falls and many of the large fires are quenched at last. Bless the 21 Canadian fire fighters and specialists who arrived yesterday. Keep them safe, in Jesus name.

Presbytery Minister Wellbeing, John Squires, reminds us in his pastoral letter this week ...

"There have been a number of Pastors and Ministers from within our Presbytery and beyond, along with ADF Chaplains, who have provided a comforting and practical presence as Disaster Recovery Chaplains. The Rev. Dr Stephen Robinson has been providing a valuable role in co-ordinating these chaplains, and has visited our Presbytery to indicate to local communities what they need to prepare for as they seek to recover. Please pray for Stephen as he continues this role, and for these Chaplains as they regroup from their intense experiences in evacuation centres, and as they continue on in their regular ministries.

The Pastoral Relations Committee of Presbytery has established a working group to plan a long-term response to the bushfire situation. The group is led by our Co-Chairs, and will be drawing from the on-the-ground experience of our leadership in Braidwood, Batemans Bay, Moruya, Narooma, Merimbula, Eden, Cooma, and Canberra.

The working group has already drafted an outline of how the Presbytery, in conjunction with Synod and Uniting, can best serve the communities in need across our region. They are meeting next week to develop a longer-term strategy, which will be presented for the consideration of Presbytery when we meet in council in March. Please pray for the people on this working group, and for the plans they are developing."

Stephen Robinson's prayer for this time:

Gracious God. You brought light out of darkness. You formed the beauty of creation from the waters of chaos. You raised us from the very dust of the earth and brought life from death. We thank you for your grace, your faithfulness, and your strength to restore. Unite your people to bless all who suffer in darkness, chaos, grief and loss. Grant us your guidance and strength, to serve faithfully as people of hope. For your sake, and that of all you love, we pray, Amen.

John, Delia and Judy - Presbytery Co-Chairs



The paintings on pp10-11 were sent to John Williams by Perry Howze.

Where is God, in the fires?



The last few months have been challenging as fires have spread across our region, and beyond.

Some people have suffered devastation and heartache of loss at close quarters. Many others have watched aghast as our screens took us right into the heart of the firestorm, standing with firefighters in the face of unbeatable odds.

It has been an intense period for many across our Presbytery. The fires have confronted us with terrible images of devastated landscapes, burnt native animals and birds, destroyed homes, and the bodies of farm stock unable to escape the fire.

We have all breathed the air that is saturated with smoke from the fires, smoke that causes us to gasp, cough, and wheeze. It has been a challenging time. And fire has been the constant theme.

It was fairly early in the summer that a prominent sports star gained publicity by suggesting that the fires were sent by God to punish us—punishing us for the many sins committed by people in Australia. Others have made claims that God is punishing us for the decisions made by our church in recent times.

We must, of course, distance ourselves from this kind of simplistic and arrogant claim. But the question still lingers: where is God, in the midst of these fires?

One of the clear affirmations that is made in contemporary Christian thinking, is the simple affirmation, that “God is with us”. God is in our midst, amongst us, within us.

And that claim, as difficult as it may be, can help us to grapple with the impact of the fires.

“God is with us” is the claim that the Gospel writer makes, when he writes that the angel told Joseph that he was to name his child Emanuel—God with us (Matt 1).

That is what that child, grown to be an adult, taught about the reign of God—that it was here, in our midst—the kingdom of God is within us (Luke 17).

That is what the ancient Hebrew psalmist affirmed, about the whole of creation—humans, animals, insects, birds, mountains and valleys, trees and forests—that when God created this whole creation, it was the spirit of God who breathed life into every living creature (Ps 104 30).

And many other psalms affirm that God is active and at work in the creation. He is not an absentee, uninterested, disconnected God. God is active, over the oceans, in the desert, through the forests, in thunder and flames. God is here, with us.

And this, after all, is the story that we tell, and retell, each year, each Sunday: the story of God, come to us in the human being Jesus, friend of sinners and advocate for the outcast, Jesus arrested and condemned as a criminal, Jesus, despised, crucified, hanging on the cross. That is where God was to be found, most profoundly, most assuredly—in the very midst of our life.

And as Jesus suffers and dies, so God suffers and feels the sharpness of the moment we call death. For that is where God is -: here, in our midst, suffering with us, amongst us.

In the same way, God is with us, in the midst of our lives, in the midst of this creation. God is present alongside the animals and human beings, suffering intensely from the fires. God is present in the ecosystems and great forests that have been scarred and devastated by the fires. God weeps, hurting, suffering with the earth, as the fires rage, burn, destroy.

The extreme and intense fires we are experiencing now are unusual; they are unprecedented.

They are the result of the way that human beings, collectively, have been living, not just this year, or for a few years, but for many years—for centuries.

The clear observations of science are, that as we have industrialised our societies and pumped more CO2 into the atmosphere, we have developed an environment that is drier, and hotter; more vulnerable to firestorms and more liable to flooding; for the creation is groaning, it is out of order.

And in the processes of nature that are at work, that we have intensified and exacerbated, we see tragic results in the multiple fire fronts that have surged in recent times—just as the same instability in the earth’s system has generated more intense and more frequent cyclones, warmed the oceans and melted the edges of the polar caps, and generated other observable extreme events around the world.

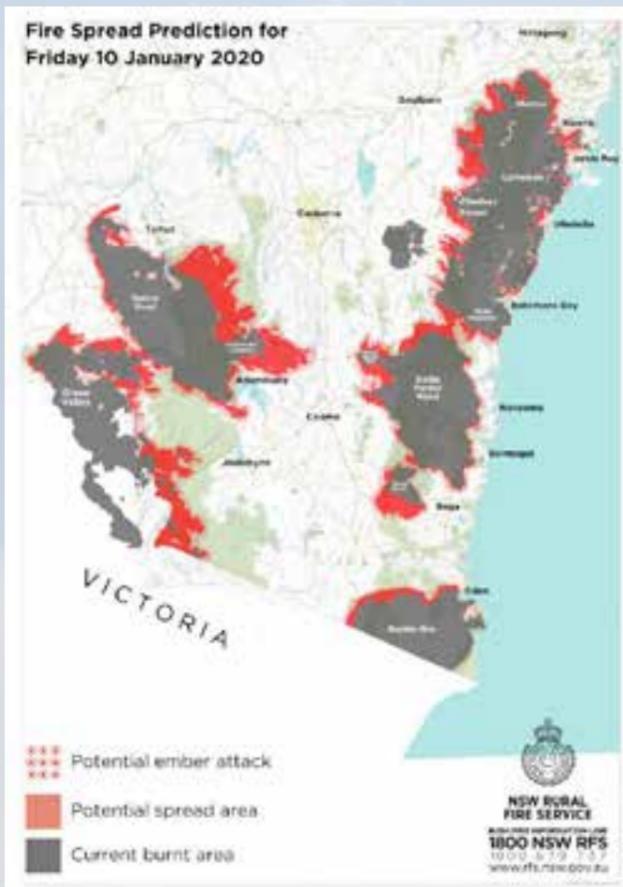
And in the midst of those cyclones, and meltings, and bleachings of coral, and eruptions of firestorms, as God suffers with us, amongst us, a clear message emerges as God communicates with us: the world cannot go on like this, the planet cannot sustain our incessant disregard for its natural ways.

God has not singled out a nation, or a people, or particular individuals for punishment. God, indeed, is not manipulating what occurs, intervening whenever and however God wills. God is in the systems, in the processes of our natural environment.

God yearns for us to live in a world that functions well, a world in which we find our own space of wellbeing, in the midst of a planet that is yearning for wellbeing.

As the fires rage, God is indeed speaking to us through those flames of fire. The challenge, for us, is to pause ... to listen ... to understand ... and to act in response.

Rev Dr John Squires
Presbytery Minister, Wellbeing



Glimpses of Presbytery

REV TIM JENSEN, former minister of North Belconnen Congregation has joined Mark Faulkner and Geoff Wellington at Saltbush as the third scattered community minister. <https://saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au/news/>



THANK YOU REV JOHN THOMAS

The first Sunday in March the congregations at Moruya and Batemans Bay said farewell to Rev John Thomas and his wife Christine as they completed over two years of ministry. John is an Anglican who enjoyed his time working and learning the ways of the Uniting Church. He gave generously to Presbytery and kept his congregation well connected and informed. His ministry was characterised by his warm, open engagement and lovely sense of humour. There was laughter in the church, faith strengthened and lay leadership was nurtured. It was a good time. So we thank you John and Christine. **John, Delia, Judy, Co-Chairs, Canberra Region Presbytery**

MILESTONES

Events will be advertised in the weekly Presbytery notices closer to the time. Save the date!

WESTON CREEK UNITING CHURCH is celebrating 50 years of Service in the Community 3rd and 4th October.

ROUND PLAIN UNITING CHURCH - Jindabyne will celebrate 150 years on 10th April - Good Friday - the actual date of the dedication 150 years ago.



Deborah Wilson holds the Award

ALPINE COMMUNITY GROUP OF THE YEAR - The Op Shop, Soul Food Kitchen and Foodbank at Jindabyne received the [Australia Day Community Group Award](#) from the mountain community on Australia Day as “a multifaceted community service that operates beyond normal expectations, all under the umbrella of the [Alpine Uniting Church](#)” The nomination was full of glowing praise for the volunteers, above. Congratulations!

Disaster response

The Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (DRCN) is a ministry of the Uniting Church - Synod of NSW and ACT. It is responsible for the recruitment, training, management and deployment of ministry agents from over 20 different Christian denominations and faith groups across the state.

Disaster response in Australia is managed by the state and territory governments so there are different plans for emergency management and welfare response in each of these. This means that there is a separate body of the DRCN in the ACT and in NSW, operating under different agreements with the two governments, but these work seamlessly, sharing chaplains across the border according to need, and operating under the same training and protocols.

The DRCN in NSW was formed in 2007 from within the State Welfare Services Committee. Prior to that, arrangements were in place for people to be supported by a range of partners: Salvation Army - catering, Red Cross - personal support and registration, Anglicare - general support and adding capacity to other partners, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) - accommodation.

It was apparent that, though three of these were faith-based groups, there was no specifically designated spiritual/pastoral care agency involved, or a means in which local faith groups were supported in response and recovery.

The Uniting Church was selected as the body to oversee this work and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed ahead of the DRCN's first deployment in 2009 to the Riverina floods.

Since that time, chaplaincy has been increasingly called upon to a degree that now the Uniting Church/DRCN is a full Community Partner alongside Red Cross, Salvation Army and Anglicare. Now, whenever and wherever an evacuation or recovery centre is open, DRCN chaplains will be deployed to be care for disaster affected people. The chaplains' role is to bring calm, and provide pastoral care. Our chaplains are also called upon to support a range of recovery events such as town meetings or mobile assistance points.

An important function of the DRCN is to support and resource local faith groups; to assist them in longer term recovery chaplaincies or in recovery projects, integrating ministers' associations in local health and well-being / recovery committees. The Uniting Church's (Moderator's) disaster relief fund is often used to assist these initiatives.

DRCN chaplains are ordained or equivalent pastoral carers or commissioned chaplains in institutions such as aged care, schools and hospitals. Key leaders in lay-led congregations can also qualify to apply. Applications require the support, through nomination, of a denominational or faith group overseer such as presbytery Officer.

For more information about the DRCN and upcoming training visit the website nswdrcn.org.au Rev Dr Stephen Robinson, Disaster Recovery.



Rev Dr Stephen Robinson who heads the Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network in NSW and ACT.

DISASTER RECOVERY

CHAPLAINCY NETWORK (DRCN)

In the front lines of the bushfire emergency, our emergency chaplains, ministers and lay leaders have been providing care, listening, prayer and support across the community, evacuation centres and at our church facilities. At the beating heart of the Uniting Church response in this crisis has been Rev Stephen Robinson above who heads the Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (DRCN) in NSW and ACT.

This is an ecumenical network of chaplains established to assist people in NSW who have been affected by disasters and major emergencies in their communities.

More details can be found at: <http://emergencyministry.com.au/>

The network complements the other welfare services in evacuation and recovery centres following major emergencies.

When disasters strike, people are affected in every aspect of their lives - physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually.

Holistic care must account for all aspects of a person's experience and need. Stephen has extensive experience in supporting communities after disasters and crises and here he provides an overview of the network and its role.

John Williams

Co-Chair, Canberra Region Presbytery

UPCOMING BASIC TRAINING COURSE April 1st and 2nd - Sydney. See a FIVE MINUTE VIDEO here... <https://vimeo.com/351124312> <https://www.nswdrcn.org.au/> Ph: 8267 4394 E: fmsg@nswact.uca.org.au

CHAPLAINS tell their stories from the firefront

You're going where??

Much to my family's alarm, on January 3, I travelled against the flow of exiting tourist traffic to the far South Coast as part of the "The Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (DRCN)". It was an enormous privilege to spend 10 days, first in various evacuation centres (Eden, Bega and Merimbula) then at the unofficial relief centres at Cobargo and Quaama.

As I reflect on this time, the faces of those I spent time with are running through my mind's eye like a film.

The family I first met on the oval in Eden. Staying in a caravan, they'd evacuated from a small town to the west of Eden. They were doing ok, confident that they were safe by the water in Eden. The next time I saw them was a different story. As conditions worsened, Eden was evacuated on Saturday night, and this family was among the people who arrived at one of the evacuation centres in Merimbula.

By now one member of the family was distressed and very anxious, worried that none of us were safe in the centre of Merimbula. Caring for this family was about providing a calm presence, encouraging the use of some simple self-care strategies, and liaising with the medical team.



Or the woman I talked with, camped in her swag on the oval at Bega Showground, sobbing in distress because her husband had refused to evacuate with her, staying to defend their home. With phone networks intermittent at best, she'd been unable to talk with him to check he was still alive.

Or the man who had lost everything except his ute and his dog and was overcome by emotion – he could not get over the fact that he'd already received a Red Cross payment into his bank account. He thought it was just so generous.

I could go on – so many stories... Stories of loss and grief and destruction, but also stories of courage and hope and generosity.

Karyl Davison
Minister,
Kippax Congregation



The fire grounds have lost their colour; the trees are charred, the ground blackened by ash.

And yet, in the midst of such devastation the plants begin to shoot the green of hidden life. Those affected by the fires are the reverse of the fire grounds. They look ordinary on the outside, while their inner person is scarred and charred.

This inner story needs to be told, and heard, over and over until the traumatised can believe what they are hearing, in their own words.

The roar of the coming flames echoes in Martha's ears weeks after the fire has past, deafening her to the present and sucking away her energy.



Judy still has her important papers and family photos in the boot of her car and they'll stay there, ready for the evacuation call, until autumn leaves fall.

Grant has drought affected stock to feed, but all the fodder he had managed to buy was scorched as the fire ran through his sheds and barren paddocks.

What to do? Sitting in a busy coffee shop, waiting for the rich brown liquid, I couldn't help but overhear a group of women at the next table. Their words revealed this was the first time the group had got together post-fire, trying to establish "normal life." The stories of loss bounced around the group: lost houses, lost sheds, lost gardens, lost confidence. The unbelievable threatened and no one stopped it.

And yet, in the midst of such devastation, just like the plants, hidden life began to rise and the conversation turned to the wisdom and knowledge they had gained through their experience.

In the narrative of loss and trauma, life pokes up its head and hope speaks. Listening and reflecting this back into the community, is the task of chaplaincy.

Dr Julie Fletcher (above with husband, Neil)
Pastor,
Braidwood Congregation

I was deployed for three days to the NSW South Coast as a Disaster Recovery Chaplain following the destructive fires in early January this year. As I drove down Brown Mountain from Canberra I wondered what I would find as this was my first deployment in this role. I went to three evacuation centers where I found people just wanted to talk about their experiences and I offered a listening ear.

For many people I discerned there was a need for their story to be heard. They wanted to tell their stories because it meant somebody else knew what had happened to them, knew how they were feeling and what they had lost. Some talked about feeling guilty because their house had survived and others in their street had been lost.

The lives of the people I spoke to are changed forever; they will find a new normal. For them, their community has dispersed. The loss and grief I heard was enormous and yet even in all of that I observed the human spirit rise up.

I listened to stories of rebuilding homes, rebuilding communities, people making sure those in hospital from their community were being visited, and helping each other by hand feeding animals which had survived.

As I travelled back home to Canberra the stories I had listened to were still with me. The next day I went to work but I could only stay for two hours. I found trying to focus on work impossible and I needed more recovery time from my experience among the families from Bega and Quaama. Presbytery provided professional supervision for me to talk through my feelings and responses and recover emotionally.

The Christian story is one of love overcoming heartache, pain and suffering. That's what I observed as I moved among the communities impacted by the fires. It was a privilege and an honour to be with them.

Pastor Heather Potter
Canberra Region Hub Chaplain for Uniting



Pam and Peter Skelton, Eden

December 2019 to February 2020 - my initiation as a chaplain-in-action. A 'baptism of fire' is blatant but true.

Eden and the surrounding communities were evacuated in the face of the Border Fire and immediately to our South approximately sixty homes were lost. The silent forests are blackened sticks and wildlife, in parts, totally gone. Many residents are still unable to return to their burnt out land or damaged homes. They are displaced in unfamiliar communities and settings.

'Unprecedented times', 'overwhelming', 'anxious', 'life-threatening', 'life changing', 'exhausting' – such words now so familiar they herald our 'new normal'.

The overtaxed vocabulary echoes an overtaxed people, those to whom we are ministering, those amongst whom we dwell. Chaplains relate similar stories; hundreds of them, each story unique but with common themes of trial and relief or trial and loss. We poise ourselves with full attention, make no presumptions, listen intently.

We allow each to feel what they feel and relate what is important to them. What is incidental to one is deeply significant to another. Our interactions and conversations are with people in need, a need to be heard, understood and redirected to additional help be it for their material needs or their physical or mental health. We, the carers, are also affected by these experiences, adjustments and ongoing traumas. Loving one another as ourselves is pertinent. (Mark 12:31)

Most chaplains have the capacity to respond to the call to serve "FIFO" (Fly in, fly out), in relative anonymity wherever assigned. The DRCN chaplains and the ADF chaplains fulfilled an important role here during the crisis period before and after the fire impact. At that stage they could go where others couldn't to access the geographically isolated and traumatised.

.../continued over

"I want to thank everyone who has prayed and thank the wider Church for their concern and active support of so many who have been affected by this ordeal." Stephen Faggotter, Eden - page 7

CHAPLAINS ... stories from the firefront - from previous page

Chaplains, like myself, who are embedded within an affected region have a different journey. Initially to stand out, literally like a shiny beacon in the smoky darkness of day or night, was necessary.



The purple tabard set one apart and among the thousands of evacuees from Mallacoota it was helpful to be clearly identifiable, the role temporary but effective. The vast ongoing scope of this disaster underscores the need to re-examine some role descriptions of disaster recovery chaplains. Personally the challenge is to continue to minister as an elder to a familiar group of people in an impacted congregation; this is necessary and normalising.

More importantly, from a healed and hopeful people, strong in Faith and Love, we will together demonstrate the gospel of Jesus. Together, as we are able, we need to keep doing what we do well! Missional activities like our pantry, community lunches, hampers and markets; all these services have increased demand. As a DRCN chaplain it is an on-again/off-again role, juggling various but related demands. This juggling is perhaps not ideal but nor is it impossible with an active congregational approach.

Urgently, beyond the familiar church-based activities, there are the hurting, displaced, unfamiliar folk also seeking comfort, with needs to be met; from their most basic; food, water, shelter, to their spiritual needs and everything in between. Not directly fire-affected but equally devastated, is the business community with its heavy dependence on tourism and the summer influx of visitors. The small mobile recovery centres are not always the best venue for chaplaincy activity. We need to be out where the people are gathering and working. Being a local is to witness the stages of disaster recovery first-hand. We observe both the difficult and the positive responses to disaster.

At present, new leaders have arisen in communities, some with great skills. Communities are coming together, resources are pooled and distributed. Generally people are aware of those who are at risk of falling through the gaps in terms of financial or social supports.

Yet, darkly, there is emerging disillusionment as people compare and contrast their circumstances and the formal and informal supports they have been able to attract. Some are angry, disappointed and resentful. There are delays and shortfalls despite the monumental efforts of many agencies to be attentive, responsive and just.

We, ministry agents and congregations, are part of an all of community response. This is the key to healing and recovery...community!

It is now, as ever, that the longstanding connections and compassionate relationships that Christian communities have built come into their own. It matters less that we are fumbling, inexpert in our attempts, unsure of what to do or say, more importantly, we simply be present, engaged, showing kindly and gentle wisdom and service.

Pam Skelton,
DRCN Chaplain and at St George's Uniting Church, Eden.

To Eden and back

My task as a Disaster Chaplain seemed simple enough. Travel to Eden and attend the Evacuation Centre for as long as required.



Little did I know that I would be part of a traumatic experience in company with many other people as we transitioned from passive watching and waiting to being part of a hastily arranged convey of coaches and private cars to Merimbula and Bega. People were struggling with their fears of the unknown as they left their home town ... what next?

I was a stranger, an interloper from Canberra. And yet, in the course of a few days I found myself increasingly accepted and embraced as a source of comfort, stability and hope.

I became aware of my role as being quite distinct from that of government agencies and other non government charities. I had the freedom to roam - to meet with people informally where they were rather than across table or with a document to complete. Mine was a rare privilege - the gift of just being myself - whilst allowing the Holy Spirit to motivate conversation and gesture in the service of others. This was my ministry.

My few days on the coast began in Eden and included a day in each of Merimbula, Cobargo and Quaarma. I returned home weary but also with a sense of fulfilment, knowing that the people I served also helped me to understand more of the sheer resilience of humanity. More than that, it reminded me that the grace of God is always present, so often when we least expect it.

Ian Diamond, Minister (retired).

CHAPLAINCY and organic capacity

When Moses led the people of Israel across the wilderness he replicated what would come to be a chaplaincy ministry, more than we first might imagine.

Moses walked for no less than forty years with the people, sharing their hardships, looking for manna each morning and extracting water from the rock. The Holy of Holies was no fixed structure; rather, a tent. The tent, good enough for the people to sleep in, and to hold the Ark of the Covenant - the very presence of God. Through the years of exile in Babylon the prophet undertook what could be imagined as a chaplaincy ministry.

The people were exiled from Temple, home, liturgy, priest and sights sounds and smells of Jerusalem. It was in this liquid space that the people of God learnt a new song, new theology, and new liturgy in a foreign land. (Psalm 137: 4) In the desert the tent remained sacred space. In Jerusalem it was the Temple; but it was destroyed twice!

I imagine that Christ and St Paul also ministered in a chaplaincy fashion. Christ said that he had no place to lay his head. (Luke 9:58) And Paul said he tried to be all things to all people. (1 Corinthians 9:19)

The point is that chaplaincy is liquid, and not a solid form. The chaplain moves with the people in moments of transition, crisis, across geographical, existential, financial and political domains. The chaplain carries the cape which represents being sent to the people to move with the people.

He or she is not sent to a static congregation; rather to a people on the move, going into, and out of, exile. Some of God's people remained in Exile to give witness to God in an alien space.

When the people go, the chaplain follows. When the people return, if they ever do, the chaplain returns alongside. The chaplain wears the uniform of the people, and the uniform is representative of transition, change and exchange.

My experience is largely in military chaplaincy. We chaplains move when the military moves; we accompany the young recruit when they first leave home and when they embrace a new vocation.

We share the dust, the wet and cold and the extremes of the human condition, in all circumstances, including peace-keeping and war. If they are tired, weary and away from home, then so are we. When they face danger so does the chaplain.

Moses and the Old Testament prophets knew this well because they never refused a space that could be called transitional space.

The model of chaplaincy will work well in the rupture and in the fissures of our present regional domain. An area that can be said to be less intact because of drought, bushfire, flood and the degradation of economic infrastructure that we once thought was everyone's birthright.

Kerry Bartlett, Minister and former Defence Chaplain, now with the Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network.



Thinking about becoming a UCA Chaplain?

To find out more get in touch with Rev Jean Shannon who is Head of Chaplaincy and Pastoral Practice at Uniting NSW.ACT.

T: 02 9376 1521 (w) E: jshannon@uniting.org

VIEWPOINT

NEXT ISSUE - Articles are due **mid-April** in time for the Presbytery meeting 16 May. Please send to the Editor, Carolyn McAllister, viewpoint@cruc.org.au Enquiries: Co-Chair John Williams 62543612 H.

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HEATHER COMMISSIONED

21 November 2019. It was a joy and a privilege for people from across the Presbytery and from within Uniting to share in today's service to commission Heather Potter into the specified ministry of Pastor within the Uniting Church, as she serves as the Canberra Region Hub Chaplain for Uniting, ministering at Mirinjani and Amala and associated sites.

Delia Quigley, Presbytery Co-Chair.

Image: John Squires

RECOVERY and RENEWAL responding to emerging need

The following is from: "A submission to UNITING - Preliminary Response to BUSHFIRE EMERGENCIES by Canberra Region Presbytery (CRP)"

1. BACKGROUND

The Moderator of the Uniting Church (UC), Simon Hansford and Disaster Chaplain Stephen Robinson, with Presbytery Co-Chairs, John Williams, Judy McKinlay, and members of the Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) - Julie and Neil Fletcher and Kerry Bartlett - visited fire-affected areas of the South Coast of NSW 28 – 30 Jan 2020.

Meetings were held in Bateman's Bay, Narooma, Cobargo, Merimbula and Eden. Representatives from each UC attended each meeting, as well as members of other churches and from the wider community.

The intention of the visit was to listen to the people who came to the meetings, to offer pastoral support, and to indicate that the UC, from Synod and Presbytery, and across the congregations, was keen to listen, reflect and respond to the emerging needs in the aftermath of the bushfires.

The conversations were open and honest and a significant number of participants related stories of horror, heroism, courage, despair, disbelief and hope as they related personal experiences of the fires and their immediate aftermath.

Many members of the UC had been proactive throughout the duration of the fires in caring for members of the bushfire ravaged community. Church halls were given over to accommodating local residents who were without housing or who had lost their homes.

The visit was intended simply to listen to people talk, and without presuming to know what it was that people wanted or needed, to provide a listening ear, to know they are loved and to see what we could do to assist, and support them in the care of their fire affected communities.

2. POTENTIAL AREAS FOR CRP TO RESPOND

1. **The enhancement of existing chaplaincy, including disaster chaplaincy, in all areas of South Coast.** As the chaplaincy is part of existing organic UC structure and resource this would easily be achieved with a review and supplementation of existing and emerging chaplaincy resources.

The chaplaincy resource would engage with the local community, and in conjunction with local UC resources, continue the churches' witness into the future as the community seeks to rebuild and get back on its feet.

The Church is called to prioritize care for the spiritual needs of all people. This is our mandate, our profession and where our skills are. A quote from Cobargo: "The challenge for the church is not to provide a strong humanitarian focus, but rather been seen for what it is: a Christian community. Our church has lost its will - it's lost its enthusiasm - our church is wounded."

So our response needs to be what we do best, and let others provide what they do best. And we need supply ministers to come with a heart to impart hope. The PRC is to be mindful that the pastoral care of these congregations remains primary throughout 2020 and beyond. And that the calling of new ministers to Eurobodalla and Merimbula congregations, because of the organic nature of ministry and chaplaincy in these areas has been an effective ministry and mission within the UC and well into the wider community.

FROM COBARGO "The challenge for the church is not to provide a strong humanitarian focus, but rather be seen for what it is: a Christian community. Our church has lost its will - it's lost its enthusiasm - our church is wounded."

2. **The establishment of ongoing debriefing, psychological first aid and intentional pastoral and psychological support** of people in key leadership positions, including first responders, ministers, lay leaders and other members of the UC who acted as first responders during and in the aftermath of the bushfires.

This could then be augmented by the provision of timely workshops, seminars or meetings, open to the public and to first responders and church elders, that could offer support in dealing with domestic violence, listening skills, psychological first aid, grief, mourning and loss, creative art and music (in trauma), trauma awareness and self-care, to further empower the community as they deal with the emotional, relational and psychological complexities that the bushfire aftermath will bring.

We are aware that people young and old are becoming very tired and also frightened of what will happen next. This anxiety is also reflected in many kids becoming withdrawn.

Our concerns are also for people who fall through cracks in the system or who don't have anyone to turn to and must face this alone as well as for the welfare of those who provide support – that they do not burn out – this especially includes our Volunteer Firefighters and Police along with all those who support them with food and accommodation.

3. **The provision of relief for members of the clergy and chaplains** so that they can take a much needed break in the knowledge that the congregations and wider community are well taken care of in their absence, that pastoral support and the leadership of essential worship will continue.

For ministry agents who are overworked and exhausted holiday "packages" are required, so they can put themselves in the car and go, with little need for planning and packing.

4. **Conduct ritual, ceremony and memorial services on a timely basis** that cover the spiritual, emotional, relational and environmental dimensions of the aftermath of the bushfires. These could be held in worship centers and in places that are central to the wider community.

5. **The facilitation of a Synod/Presbytery team to revisit the areas of concern at timely intervals** to show concern and pastoral support, and to demonstrate the ongoing care, concern and willingness to continue pastoral care and resource support, long after the immediate impact of the bushfires.

6. **The need to be mindful that a significant number of people, families and others will fall-through-the-cracks**, and therefore be forgotten. We were reminded that the homeless, and some who have become so severely traumatized may remain hidden.

7. **The provision of many practical items** to build longer term capacity to respond and practical items for short term needs.

Longer Term Issues:

- **Long term vouchers** to spend in local businesses (UC has been doing this successfully in some drought-affected towns). Can be coordinated through local Chamber of Commerce or Shire Council, or perhaps local UC Op Shops!
- **Generators** to back up church refrigeration so as to maintain food supply and the provision of meals into community evacuation centers.
- **Shower and Toilet facilities** (portable), installation and upgrade of such to allow church facilities to better support community evacuation centers.

- **Water filtration capacity** in church facilities used to support and service community recovery and evacuation centers.

- **Emergency Packs** including torches and torch batteries, radios and radio batteries, mobile charging facilities and other essential emergency items needed in church halls and other church facilities when they are used as evacuation centers or overflow and support to evacuation centers.

Shorter Term Issues:

- **Vouchers provided to schools** for students needing school shoes, sports equipment, uniforms, lunch-boxes etc.

- **Buddy Bags** - For kids going back to school - many not yet started and parents finding it hard to get school supplies together.

- **Air purifiers** and related appropriate over-the-counter pharmaceuticals- The Bega Women's Centre has identified that many folk are struggling with the constant smoke.

- **Tools, chain saws, wheelbarrows**- For people looking for things in burnt-out homes, clean-ups, starting again.

3. POTENTIAL AREAS FOR CRP and UNITING to RESPOND

Our submission is to give Uniting a sense of our thinking and insights in CRP on needs brought to our attention following our visit this week to Bushfire impacted communities on the South Coast. Clearly as a whole church there are items which fall within the Synod and Presbytery while many fall where Uniting Synod, Presbytery and congregations can work together to deliver the outcomes community and congregations seek.

We in CRP have a history and keen desire to work seamlessly with Uniting and much has been facilitated through the tireless efforts of Briony Griffiths as Uniting Church and Community Engagement Leader. In responding to the needs of our communities suffering trauma and pain as consequences of the ongoing Bushfire Emergencies, we hope that together we can deliver some wonderful outcomes.

CRP Working Group on Response to Bushfire Emergency: John Williams (convenor), Judy McKinlay, Kerry Bartlett, John Sutton, Julie Fletcher, Terence Corkin, Noel Williams, David Russell, Michael Palmer and Pam Skelton.

2 February 2020.

Who wants to become an ordained minister?

FORMATION OF CANDIDATES FOR MINISTRY IN THE UNITING CHURCH

Explaining how the Bible relates to our lives, knowing our Christian traditions, having skills in pastoral care, as well as being administratively organised, committed to the Uniting Church way of being, effective in public speaking and empathic in deep listening, and so many more things ... this is what we expect of people who are our ministers, is it not?

The way that the Uniting Church prepares people for ministry as ordained people is set out in the **National Standards** for education and formation of candidates for ordained ministries. These Standards are set by the National Assembly and apply to all six Uniting colleges.

The Standards were revised in 2016 by the Assembly's Education for Ministry Working Group (John Squires was a member at that time). These Standards uphold a strong commitment to holding an informed faith, through critical study of Scripture and tradition; they have a contextual focus, valuing the formation of candidates in local places; and they advocate flexible pathways to formation, through a range of study programmes which meet the needs of a diverse church.

This is why we are able to host a **Formation Cohort in Canberra**. The Standards provide a clear focus for education and formation. They allow for new ways of shaping people, doing this in regional groups closely connected with the life of the church. That is how we are able to have a cohort of candidates based in Canberra, preparing for ministry in the church. The Standards no longer set out a prescribed list of courses for a candidate to study; rather, they identify clusters of attributes that candidates must display prior to ordination.

You can read them at https://assembly.uca.org.au/education-for-ministry/resources/ordained-ministries/item/download/1139_d95ff597bed131f8b3448f0ace3596dd

1. The Standards emphasise that all studies are to be undertaken through the lens of the Uniting Church's multicultural commitments and covenantal relationship with First Peoples. Education and formation for Ordination is to be undertaken in the light of the ethos of the Uniting Church, reflecting its heritage, polity, and theology.

2. The Standards encourage an emphasis on flexibility in courses, taking into account prior education and experience, the particular calling and ministry that a candidate is preparing for, and ensuring the ability to undertake study in remote locations.

3. The Standards advocate a focus on producing ministers who are equipped for ministry in a multicultural and multi faith community, in accord with our commitments made when the Uniting Church came into existence in 1977. In accord with our Basis of Union, the study and formation undertaken by candidates is critically informed (as we enter into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry), ecumenically engaged (as we relate to our partners within the world-wide fellowship of churches), contextually relevant (through contact with contemporary thought), and missionally oriented (as we engage with contemporary societies).

It is my hope that the study of theology and formation for ministry of our candidates will be a challenging, deepening, and empowering experience, equipping them for faithful and effective service in ministry.

John Squires, Presbytery Minister, Wellbeing



Riana reflects

When ministers gather to contemplate and discuss their ministry, one often hears of the different journeys they have been through that brought them on to the path of ordination and into ministry. For some it might have been as straight forward as simply knowing since childhood, while for others it could have come through a time of some resistance, sojourning elsewhere, before their eventual "surrender" to heed the call and enter the process.

The Uniting Church has various human, educational, and practical resources in place to assist and support someone considering ordained ministry.

It starts off with taking those first steps in embarking on this life-long, tight-knit journey together in God - of church, congregation/placement and minister and in most cases spouses/families - with all its nuances.

In the next issue of Viewpoint

"Meet our current Candidates in the Canberra Region Presbytery"

For more on "The Process to Ordination", go to: <https://ucaqld.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Ordination-process2.pdf> and for more on the "Assembly's Education for Ministry", go to: <https://assembly.uca.org.au/education-for-ministry>

Challenges

One needs to be aware from the start of these relational complexities in this multi-faceted journey and the various aspects and tasks that involve ministry, since navigating through it all is a constant challenge which many-a-time can bring about frustration and often entail hardship. For this reason, the church requires a prospective candidate to prepare through a **period of discernment** under the guidance of a mentor before undertaking study and formation towards ordination and becoming a minister. It is not only a matter of counting the costs, but also envisioning the rewards.

REV OCKERT MEYER, former minister of Wesley, Canberra is now based at **United Theological College** Sydney. He maintains contact with Canberra Region Presbytery's **Formation Program** as the liaison person.



Newly inducted **Presbytery Minister - Wellbeing**, Rev John Squires, concisely captures just how challenging it is, by listing in

the first paragraph of his article on the previous page, what members envision with regard to ministers.

The question is:

How does the Uniting Church go about this immense challenge of guiding and equipping those who might feel called to ministry?

How do these would-be ministers engage with the church in the process?

According to Rev Squires, the preparation of ministry agents or candidates is preceded by the **National Standards** that Assembly sets with regard to their education and formation for ordination. These apply throughout all the Synods and all six Uniting colleges. Rev Squires served on the Assembly Committee that revised these National Standards in 2016. He says the Uniting Church is committed to Candidates holding an informed faith through critical study of Scripture and tradition and with a contextual focus.

When it comes to contextual focus, it isn't just about insight into the life and times of the biblical stories and characters.

Much value is placed on the experience to be gained from formation in local places to help meet the diverse needs of the church.

This approach made it possible for the **Canberra Region Presbytery to establish a Formation Cohort** to enable the candidates of this region to practically prepare for ministry locally and within the various contexts at hand. Therefore, candidates are no longer simply bound to complete a prescribed list of study courses to be admitted to ministry, but rather have the enhanced opportunity for hands-on experience in real ministry settings throughout their study and formation. This also helps create both the time and means through which the cluster of attributes candidates must display before ordination, can be identified and developed.

Study courses and flexibility

When it comes to study courses, the Standards put emphasis on flexibility, taking into account

- a student's prior education and experience
- the particular calling and ministry that a candidate is preparing for - whether Minister of the Word, Deacon or Chaplaincy
- the particular gifts a candidate displays, encouraging cultivation and development thereof
- ensuring the ability to undertake study and formation in remote locations.

Uniting Church ethos

Rev Squires further mentions that all these activities are well embedded within the self-understanding of the Uniting Church. On the previous page, he says: "All studies are to be undertaken through the lens of the Uniting Church's multicultural commitments and covenantal relationship with First Peoples. Education and formation ... is to be undertaken in the light of the ethos of the Uniting Church ..."

It is the aim of the Uniting Church to equip ministers "for ministry in a multicultural and multi faith community in accord with the commitments made when the Uniting Church came into existence in 1977", says Rev Squires.

Even though the journey is long and the path difficult, yet it is also and always filled with the enfolding grace of God's love and reconciliation in Christ Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, continuously discovered together on the way and leading to ever greater gratitude, growth and, hopefully, humility and spiritual wisdom.

Riana Kok, Minister, Yarralumla Congregation.



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