



Thursday 9 January 2020

**TO THE CLERGY AND PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF BROKEN BAY
NATIONAL BUSHFIRE CRISIS**

My dear brothers and friends,

Our new year has started in the most dramatic of circumstances. We have been confronted with the enormity of the scale of bushfire which has brought loss of life, the destruction of property and landscape, and the demise of wildlife. It has been a heartbreaking time for many in Australia, and an anxious one for us all.

All of us have been deeply affected by this crisis. We have now lived with the impact of fire and smoke for many months. There has been fire burning in the north western territory of our own Diocese for many weeks. On New Year's Eve some of our own CatholicCare homes had to be evacuated in Blue Haven, near Warnervale. Fire has reached the doorsteps of others. Our local RFS brigades, which include a number of CatholicCare staff, have been involved in the fight against the bushfires in other parts of NSW. All of us have known of people recently cut off on the NSW South Coast and beyond or who have had their lives changed forever because of the events that have unfolded. We feel vulnerable before the power of nature, our powerlessness before drought and fire, our thirst for rain – all of which leads to a profound concern about our climate.

Many of us are now wondering how we might assist those who have been as tragically affected. It is important, indeed, that along with so many who are now contributing to help those people and communities who have been especially affected by this crisis that, as a Diocese, we too join this effort.

Bishop Randazzo has asked that I work with you to frame a coordinated and effective strategy of assistance across our Diocese. Subsequently:

- 1. I ask that the following be implemented across our Diocese in alignment with the strategy adopted by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference:**
 - a. That as from this weekend, at every weekend Mass in each Parish of the Diocese the Prayer for those Affected by Bushfire and Drought be prayed. This is available on <https://catholic.org.au/images/bushfire/bushfire%20resources%202.pdf>
 - b. That the weekend of Australia Day 25/26 January be allocated as one on which special collections might be taken up in all our Parishes. Parishes may do this in a variety of ways appropriate to their circumstances. Of course, collections can commence before those dates.
 - c. That monies raised by each Parish be donated directly to the Vinnie's Bushfire Appeal. The St Vincent de Paul Society is part of an integrated, whole of community response and is working with other lead agencies to accompany people whose lives have been devastated by the fires. The ways in which such donations will be used are outlined on the donation page: <https://donate.vinnies.org.au/appeals-nsw/vinnies-nsw-bushfire-appeal-nsw>
- 2. CatholicCare Broken Bay is available at all times for those who may require both housing assistance and counselling.** Please do not hesitate to ring Phillipine at our CatholicCare Office on 9481 2689 in regard to any inquires. To assist people who have been impacted by the devastating bushfires, NSW Minister Ward has today announced the establishment of a dedicated **Bushfire Housing Assistance Service**. The Service will comprise of two key elements:

- A Bushfire Housing Assistance Line managed and accessed through the Disaster Welfare Assistance Line (DWAL). The entry point is the DWAL number 1800 018 444. This service is available to anyone affected by bushfire state-wide.
- Bushfire Housing Assistance Response Team (BHART) in the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Southern NSW areas.

The Bushfire Housing Assistance Line will take calls from people needing housing support and will offer assistance by way of temporary accommodation and Rentstart Bond Loan and Advance rent. Standard eligibility rules will be relaxed for people who have been temporarily or permanently displaced by bushfire.

3. **The Broken Bay Catholic Schools Office** in the coming week will work with our school leaders and staff in respect to the care of our children and families on their return from summer to school. In the meantime, the Australian Psychological Society has published information for parents/carers of children affected by the bush fires: <https://www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/Disasters/Bushfires/Recovering-from-bushfires>. This may be of assistance to parents more generally.
4. **By Monday 13 January our Diocese will have a special page on our website:** www.bbcatholic.org.au/bushfires. This page will detail all the various initiatives that are being taken by our Diocese in response to the crisis and offer a range of possibilities for both individuals and communities to assist in this response. We will also post a range of other resources for use by people and parishes at this difficult time for our nation. Included on this page will also be a range of prayers and liturgical resources that can be engaged.
5. We have also been notified that **Albert & Meyer would like to offer free grief support to anyone who feels they need assistance during the bushfire crisis.** Up until 31st March 2020 if you feel you or someone you know would benefit from some time with a grief support worker, please call on 9484 3992 to arrange a time.

In such a time it is natural to want to assist communities in a personal and direct way. Already a number of our parishes and schools have made contact with their counterparts in affected areas. Whilst this is commendable, it is also important to recognize that such communities can be feeling overwhelmed and inundated. Contributing to a central Fund such as the Vinnies Bushfire Appeal ensures that people are being assisted in the best possible way by those who have first-hand knowledge of real needs. **However, should you seek further guidance about such possibilities, or wish to share what you are doing, please ring Liane Giuliano, our Diocese's Development & Relationships Manager on 02 8379 1664.**

No doubt as the recovery from this disaster emerges there will be further responses that we can make. We will consider these as circumstances compel us and convey them to you accordingly. In the meantime, I hope that you will find these initial requests and recommendations helpful. Our main way of assisting at this stage is through our prayer and by our donations.

Let us continue to hold in our hearts those who have lost so much, and especially let us remember in prayer of gratitude those who are giving of themselves as generously to protect life and property and those who are volunteering in many different ways in support of our communities.

With my sincere gratitude for your consideration,



Very Rev Dr David Ranson
Vicar General