

# Bushfires

**On Ash Wednesday**, Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> February 1983, some of the most devastating fires in recent decades occurred. In Victoria in the Dandenong area, around Mount Macedon and west of the Great Ocean Road, and in the Adelaide Hills and other parts of South Australia. Thirty four lives were lost, hundreds of homes and other buildings destroyed and massive property and stock losses were incurred.

For example in the area stretching between Framlingham, Terang and Timboon in Victoria, 85,000 hectares of prime dairy land were burnt: 11 lives were lost, 152 houses destroyed, 41 dairies and 8 shearing sheds and 35,000 cattle. 720 families were officially registered as affected in some way.

In the Mt. Macedon area of Victoria many lives were lost, whilst others were disfigured and maimed; over four hundred and seventy homes were destroyed, as well as shops, churches and community facilities being lost. (See "Ash Wednesday, Bush fires and the Church of the Resurrection" in Liebelt, Philip and Nicholls, Noel (ed.) *Gentle Rain on Parched Earth* JBCE, 1996)

“After the Fire”

# Ash Wednesday Commemorative Service

16<sup>th</sup> February, 1984  
Terang Uniting Church

**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION TO THEME:**

**CALL TO WORSHIP:**

**HYMN:** “Our God, our help in ages past”

**PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION:** *(Together)*

Most merciful God,  
We humbly admit that we need your help.  
We confess that we have wandered from your way;  
we have done wrong,  
and we have failed to do what is right.  
You alone can save us.  
Have mercy on us.  
Wipe out our sins and teach us to forgive others.  
Bring forth in us the fruit of the Spirit  
that we may live as disciples of Christ.  
This we ask in the name of Jesus our Saviour.

**AMEN.**

**DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS:**

**ANTHEM:** “Great is Thy Faithfulness”

**OLD TESTAMENT READING:** Isaiah 6:1-8

**HYMN:** “Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways.”

**NEW TESTAMENT READING:** Romans 8:28, 35, 37-39

**GOSPEL:** Matthew 5:13-16

**HYMN:** “Morning has Broken”

**ADDRESS:**

**ANTHEM:**

## **A LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE AND HOPE:**

Leader: Loving God,  
our prayers today have been where our hearts and minds  
have been this year  
with the day of the fire  
and all that has happened since.  
We remember that day  
when the foundation of our life was shaken  
and there was grief that seemed too great to bear,  
yet

People: Lord, in your mercy  
we were upheld and saved.

Leader: We come before you, not alone  
but in the company of others.

People: We share our gratitude with each other  
and it becomes greater.

Leader: We share our troubles with each other  
and they become smaller.

People: We share one another's griefs and burdens  
and their weight becomes possible to bear.

Leader: We remember the tragedies:  
the death of people we knew and loved,  
the black wasteland of our countryside,  
the fears of our children,  
the grief and despair at the loss  
of our homes, our herds, our hopes.

People: Lord, in your mercy,  
comfort our sorrowing,  
heal our memories,  
let there be peace,  
let their be hope.

Leader: We give thanks for those who fought the fire  
and all who, with heroism,  
stood beside us on that awful day.

We give thanks for the support and care  
of our wider community, and state and nation;  
for all that encouraged and sustained us  
in those early days.

People: Lord, in your mercy  
you gave faith in the ashes of disillusionment  
strength to cope with the tasks of the day  
and courage to face the uncertainties of the future.

Leader: We give thanks for everyone  
who helped speed our recovery  
respected our dignity  
and restored our hope.

Those who worked amongst us from government  
and voluntary groups, the church  
and a host of friends, neighbours and generous citizens.

People: Lord, in your mercy  
let the hope and the love  
we were given  
remain in our hearts.

Leader: We remember how we ourselves coped,  
how despair sometimes gave way to anger  
and guilt erupted in anger  
and anxiety sapped our energy.

People: Lord, in your mercy,  
lift us from despair and loss,  
take all that happens to us  
and turn it to good account  
so that the fire of adversity  
will deepen our trust  
in your eternal providence.

Leader: We remember  
the tears and the good humour  
the tiredness and the comfort  
the fellowship of suffering and community  
and the way we were given  
grace to hold on and to know  
that weeping may endure for a night  
but joy comes in the morning.

People: Lord, in your mercy  
grant us serenity to accept what cannot be changed  
and courage to do what we can.

Leader: We give thanks  
for the regeneration of nature  
the restoration of our lives  
and the recovery of our hope.

People: Lord, in your mercy  
continue to sustain and direct us.  
Let there be peace.  
Let there be hope.  
Let there be love.

Leader: This we ask through the one  
whose spirit inspires our compassion,  
Jesus our Lord.

People: **AMEN.**

**HYMN:** "Immortal, invisible, God only wise."

**BENEDICTION:**

# **Other Worship Resources for use after Bushfires**

This collection was prepared by Rev Pam Wyley, now minister of The Uniting Church in Australia at Bright, Victoria. At the time of the Ash Wednesday fires, Pam was a local councillor in the Cockatoo area - east of Melbourne - which was particularly devastated by the fires.

## **THANKSGIVING:**

People: We give you thanks for life, O God;

Leader: For the resilience of nature -  
regrowth on blackened suffering trees;  
New grass ... new hope;

People: We give you thanks for life, O God;

Leader: For the lives of all who reach out  
and grasp our hands,  
Offering their strength,  
renewing our hope.

People: We give you thanks for life, O God;

Leader: For the strength and courage  
we can draw from trusting you;

People: We give you thanks for renewal and recreation.

**AMEN.**

## **REMEMBERING: We called upon Your name.**

Silent ,  
Lifeless,  
piles of rubble,  
once a house standing solid  
in the shelter of the mountain.  
A home,  
With life and laughter;  
a pile of firewood standing by the door  
ready to warm us through and through,  
a dog's kennel standing in the yard;  
A place for sheltering and belonging.  
For home and family  
we give you thanks;  
for shelter and warmth  
we give you thanks.  
With frightening all consuming fury  
the fire came,  
servant turned master.  
Without discrimination,  
Ripping,  
Roaring, devouring,  
fed by gale force winds;  
searing, scorching, life destroying;  
seeking to become soul destroying.

In our fear, O God,  
we called upon your name,  
and you journeyed with us  
as we fled.

Smoke billowing,  
hanging, pausing, sweeping on;  
permeating, filling nostrils,  
imprinting memory with  
choking fear.

In our fear, O God,  
we called upon your name,  
and you breathed your  
breath into our lungs.

Watching, waiting,  
fiery night time skies glowing  
with colours of red and orange,  
changing winds,  
exploding cylinders;  
giant fire crackers.  
Shuddering, trembling crowds,  
now silent,  
now talking,  
now crying,  
now comforting each other.

In our devastation  
we called upon your name  
and your arms embraced us.

Chimney standing straight and tall;  
refusing to give up its life  
to the cruelty of the flames;  
at its feet  
the roof lies bent and twisted;  
lamenting;  
try as it would to stand,  
it could not;  
without support its life is gone;

In our powerlessness  
we called upon your name,  
O God;  
and you stood with us  
and mourned.



Kneeling among the ashes;  
searching;  
longing to find a coin,  
a toy, a keepsake;  
but the power which devoured its life  
yields nothing;  
knees blackened and scorched  
we wept;

In our grief, O God;  
we called upon your name  
and you knelt with us  
and wept.

You said come with me and rest  
a while for I am gentle  
and I will give you rest for your  
weary souls ...

And we went ....  
and we rested  
your arms held us safe,  
in you we found refuge.

#### **RESURRECTION:**

Re-awakening,  
rebuilding, renewing life;  
calling forth from the earth,  
fresh shoots of grass,  
burnt lifeless branches budding,  
life struggling to reappear.

We praise your name,  
Creator God.

Digging, hammering, sawing,  
establishing and re-establishing;  
in defiance of the elements  
and their destruction;  
Courage, strength, faith  
and the will to go on  
rise up and soar above despair;  
Creator God,  
your Spirit bears us up on  
eagles' wings;  
creating re-creating.

Community,  
togetherness and camaraderie;  
drawing strength from one another;  
walking as neighbours;  
sharing stories;  
stories of hope;  
stories of new life;  
stories of resurrection.

Your faithfulness,  
your steadfastness,  
your belief in us, O God,  
bears us up and carries us  
when we would break  
beneath the load.

Come Holy Spirit energise us  
with your power;  
Come Holy Spirit walk with us  
and bring to life  
our stories of hope.

**HYMN:** 'Darkness Into Light'  
(Tune 87.87 Suggest Australian Hymn Book 148 'Love Divine')

Lead me gently,  
Lead me firmly,  
Through the darkness of my night;  
Jesus, Saviour,  
Walk beside me;  
Turn my darkness into light.

In the pain of  
Life's deep sorrows,  
When I weep in deep despair;  
Jesus, Saviour,  
Still keep near me,  
Hold me in your loving care.

When my heart seems  
Like it's breaking,  
When this life seems cruel and grey,  
Jesus, Saviour,  
Take my anguish,  
Heal my breaking heart today.

Take my pain and  
bring me healing,  
Take my fear and give me peace,  
Turn my sorrow  
into laughter,  
Grant me hope and joy and peace.

## **BLESSING OF SPECIAL OFFERING: BUSHFIRE RELIEF**

We come in humility,  
We come in gratitude;  
We come giving thanks for all the gifts  
you have showered on us;  
We come offering to walk with those  
who suffer in the wake of this fire.  
Show us the way;  
Bless the offering we bring,  
So that those who are hurting  
Know we truly care;  
Through Jesus Christ,  
giver of the greatest gift.

**AMEN**

## **PRAYER FOR HEALING:**

Gracious and ever faithful God,  
who through your son  
knows what it is to be fully human,  
Feel and hear the pain of your people;

Weep with us,  
Lest our hearts break.

Gracious and ever loving God,  
Reach out to us  
as we reach out to you;

Befriend us,  
Lest we feel alone.

Ever-present and nurturing God,  
Surround your people  
with a cocoon of warmth and care;  
held with the softness of silk,  
and the strength of strong twine.  
Begin a gentle healing,  
that from pain  
may come new life.

Hold us safe  
and nurture us,  
Lest we shrivel up within.

Emerging slowly to new life  
Fragile and tentative,  
Faith tested,  
faith nurtured,  
hold your people, Loving God,  
in the palm  
of your healing hands.

Drench us in your love,  
Bring us to new life,  
with re-creating power ...  
Through Jesus Christ  
we pray ...

**AMEN.**

Each time you look at a fiery  
sunset ... may the healing power  
of the Holy Spirit ... gently  
touch your tears and peace  
and understanding ... until once  
again you see the sunset for  
its pure beauty ... and  
the glory of God's creation.

**SENDING OUT:**

Go now to rebuild the life  
God has given you.  
Go with renewed strength;  
Go with hope and confidence  
That we will be the hands and feet  
of Jesus Christ walking with you;  
Go knowing that the Holy Spirit bears  
you up and carries you where you  
could not walk alone.

**AMEN.**