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VICTORIAN BUSHFIRE DISASTER APPEAL

To all Uniting Church Congregations, from the President of the Assembly

Dear friends,

A national appeal has been launched by the Assembly in co-operation with the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania to enable the church to play its part in the care and recovery of victims of the Victorian bushfires. This letter to all congregations is a follow-up to the letter and information issued on Monday 9th February, which can be found on the Assembly website <http://assembly.uca.org.au/> and the Synod website.

I now write to request every congregation of the Uniting Church throughout the country to hold a retiring offering for the appeal in the next few weeks.

The proceeds of the appeal will be used by the church to:

- provide emergency assistance to any bushfire victims who've missed out on the immediate help they need;
- provide for longer-term pastoral support, rehabilitation and recovery programs for individuals, families and communities devastated by the fires.

It is this latter purpose where the Uniting Church has developed its expertise in recent years. Sending in teams of trained ministers and counsellors into the traumatised communities a few weeks after the fires, at a time when other assistance is dropping off, has proved to be of very significant benefit. Following that up by providing longer-term support, sometimes by appointing a counsellor to be present in an affected community for months afterwards, even up to two years later, has again proved to be of enormous help.

The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania is already working for the immediate assistance of victims and is planning for its long-term role. The Assembly contributed an immediate \$50,000 on Monday to help this work, as this appeal was launched.

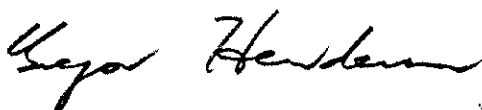
If individuals wish to give tax-deductible donations then they can do so via the website established by the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania at <http://www.shareappeal.org.au/donate-now/make-a-donation> or over the telephone Free Call 1800 668 426.

In some synods there is the experience of people being able to make a donation through a congregational donation and receiving an individual receipt for taxation purposes. If your synod is used to this sort of arrangement the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania is willing to provide individual receipts when provided with the necessary information.

Cheques from the proceeds of retiring offerings are to be made out to SHARE Community Appeal – Bushfire Disaster Appeal and mailed to Share Community Appeal GPO Box 4355, Melbourne Victoria 3001.

Friends, we join with all Australians in mourning the terrible loss of lives in Victoria and the destruction of homes, possessions and communities. A variety of prayer and worship resources for use in congregations and community settings can be found through the Assembly website at <http://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/53-bushfires2009/425-liturgical.html> Please pray that further losses from these disastrous bushfires will be minimal; please pray for the emergency services still fighting the fires and for those with other heavy tasks and responsibilities; and please encourage our church members to be generous in their support for the appeal.

In the service of Christ,



Rev Gregor Henderson
President