

## Ecumenical Liturgy for the Victims of the Bushfires

Matthew 5: 4

Then Jesus began to speak, and taught them, saying:  
“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”



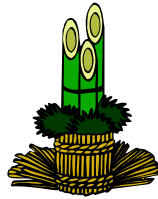
Liturgy prepared by Michael Hansen, Director of Faith & Ministry, Lavalla Catholic College, Traralgon, Vic.  
and Sophy Morley, Diocesan Coordinator for Liturgy, Diocese of Sale, Victoria.

## RITUAL OUTLINE

*Our prayers of sadness and grief are always tempered by the hope that we are given as a Christian people. Death is not the end, but a doorway to a new existence. The consolation and love promised us by Jesus is a beacon of hope to all those who suffer.*

*Invite all people of good will to join in an ecumenical liturgy to pray together to the Lord for comfort and consolation.*

### PREPARING THE SACRED SPACE



*Select from the following to create a sacred space for prayer - always include the Cross and a candle*

- Cross, Bible and Candle(s)
- Decorative cloth, gel or oil burner, incense, flowers, bowl of sand with tapers or bowl of water with flower petals, basket of flowers, photographs, personal memorabilia, basket for cards /cut-out paper hearts, pens, music (CD, cassette, live music - singers/musicians)
- For smaller groups, arrange the prayer sheets in a wide circle around the prayer focus
- Have a box or two of tissues handy
- Full order of service for Presiders/ prayer sheets for the assembly.

### HOSPITALITY

- Consider ways in which you can publicise this event in your community: parish bulletin and school bulletins (both government and Catholic; local Christian churches, radio & newspaper announcements, flyers left with local businesses, email etc.
- Ensure that you have welcomers at the church doors, ready to greet people, hand them orders of service and whatever else they may need and to usher them in.
- Remember that some participants may not be used to being in church and that religious ritual may be daunting for them. Others, although Christian, may not have been inside a Catholic church before. Please welcome all as honoured guests.
- You may wish to provide some light refreshment at the end of the liturgy. This is often a good time for people to debrief, share each other's company and meet others for the first time.

# Ecumenical Liturgy for the Victims of the Bushfires

## Call to Prayer

Leader: Out of our shock and fear

**All: We cry to you, O Lord**

Leader: Out of our disbelief and denial

**All: We cry to you, O Lord**

Leader: Out of our grief and sadness

**All: We cry to you, O Lord**

God of our hearts,

We are heavy with sadness at the tragedy that has befallen so many people.....

Our minds struggle to come to terms with the horror of these past few days.....

Our hearts are like stones in our chests,

as we mourn the dead and stand in solidarity with the survivors.....

Lord, where is the joy, peace, hope and safety that you promised?

Have you forgotten us, Lord?

## ***Silence***

## Opening Prayer:

Leader: *"Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge." (Psalm 16:1)*

God of the mountains and the forests, the awesome power of nature can be both a wonder as well as a source of tragedy. We cry out to you in this time of great need to the people affected by the wild fires in our State.

Almighty and everlasting God, comfort of the sad and source of strength to those who suffer: Let the prayers of your children who are in trouble rise to you. We lift up to you the people of Callignee, Balook, Jeeralang, Koornalla, Hazelwood and Churchill ..... We also remember the families at King Lake, Flowerdale, Hazeldene, Taggerty, Narbethong, Marysville, Steel's Creek, Yarra Glen, St Andrews, Arthurs Creek, Strathewen, Hurneville Wandong, Bunyip, Eaglehawk, Long Gully, Horsham, Corryong and Healesville ... ***(here name places of concern)*** and in all the places where wild fire has taken its toll.

For those who have lost loved ones, grant your peace; for those who have lost homes, property, livelihood and livestock, grant your resilience; for those who seek shelter and food, grant your comfort; for those suffering terrible burns, grant your healing; for those whose lives have been shattered, grant your strength; for those who have lost everything, grant that we may be their hope.

God of wisdom and strength, guide the hands of those who provide emergency relief. We entrust to you those who fight against the power of the flames, those who care for the bereaved, those with the gift of healing, those who carry the burdens of moving debris, and those who distribute much needed supplies. Give them the endurance that is needed to continue their good works.

God of all consolation, in the midst of things we shudder to think about, tragedy of historic proportions, and grieving too heavy to bear, grant your peace. This is a time when we welcome your Word of hope born into our world. May that hope settle in our hearts. We ask this through Jesus Christ our comforter and consoler.

**All: Amen**

## Lighting of the Christ Candle

*The single candle stands as a sign of the Risen Jesus in the people gathered here.*

### Opening Responses<sup>1</sup>

Come among us God of our hearts:

You, who cast the forests in the ranges  
and cradle the blue wren in her nest

**AII: COME GOD AND MEET US HERE**

Come among us God of our hearts:

You, who bless the poor and the broken  
and stand by the sad and the lost

**AII: COME GOD AND MEET US HERE**

Come among us God of our hearts:

You, who dance in the silence  
and shine in the darkest night

**AII: COME GOD AND MEET US HERE**

Come among us God of our hearts:

You, who comforted Mary's broken heart  
at the foot of the cross.

**AII: COME GOD AND MEET US HERE**

Come among us God of our hearts:

You, who knows the deep numbness  
felt by those pushed beyond their limits.

**AII: COME GOD AND MEET US HERE**

Come among us God of our hearts:

You, who stands with us in our sorrow  
and weeps with us in our grief.

**AII: COME GOD AND MEET US HERE**



### Words of Remembrance

*You are invited to tell us why you have come and for what or for whom you stand in prayer with. How has this firestorm touched you?*

## LITURGY OF THE WORD

### First Reading

**OPTION 1: Job 7:1-4, 6-7.**<sup>2</sup>

A reading from the book of Job

*I am filled with sorrow all day long.*

Job began to speak:

Is not man's life on earth nothing more than pressed service,  
his time no better than hired drudgery?

Like the slave, sighing for the shade,

<sup>1</sup> Residents of Mudgee, Victoria, comfort one another. Picture: Ben Swinnerton. Herald Sun Gallery <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/gallery>

<sup>2</sup> The scriptural quotations are taken from the Jerusalem Bible, published and copyright 1966, 1967 and 1968 by Darton Longman and Todd Ltd and Doubleday & Co Inc, and used by permission of the publishers.

or the workman with no thought but his wages,  
months of delusion I have assigned to me,  
nothing for my own but nights of grief.  
Lying in bed I wonder, 'When will it be day?'  
Risen I think, 'How slowly evening comes!'  
Restlessly I fret till twilight falls.  
Swifter than a weaver's shuttle my days have passed,  
and vanished, leaving no hope behind.  
Remember that my life is but a breath,  
and that my eyes will never again see joy.

The word of the Lord.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

**OPTION 2:                    Lamentations 3:17-26**

A reading from the book of Lamentations

*It is good to wait in silence for the Lord to save.*

My soul is shut out from peace;  
I have forgotten happiness.  
And now I say, 'My strength is gone,  
that hope which came from the Lord'.  
Brooding on my anguish and affliction  
is gall and wormwood.  
My spirit ponders it continually  
and sinks within me.  
This is what I shall tell my heart,  
and so recover hope:  
the favours of the Lord are not all  
past,  
his kindnesses are not exhausted;  
every morning they are renewed;  
great is his faithfulness.  
'My portion is the Lord' says my soul  
'and so I will hope in him.'  
The Lord is good to those who trust him,  
to the soul that searches for him.  
It is good to wait in silence  
for the Lord to save.



The word of the Lord. <sup>3</sup>

**All: Thanks be to God.**

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<sup>3</sup> Burnt out property at Callignee, Latrobe Valley, Victoria. Picture: Tim Carrafa, Herald Sun Gallery  
<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/gallery>

## **Responsorial Psalm**

**OPTION 1: Psalm 34**<sup>4</sup> (said or sung: see *Gather Australia 36*)

Psalmist: The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.

**All: The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.**

I will bless the Lord at all times,

With praise ever in my mouth.

Let my soul glory in the lord,

Who will hear the cry of the poor.

**All: The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.**

Let the lowly hear and be glad.

The Lord listens to their pleas;

And to hearts broken, God is near,

Who will hear the cry of the poor.

**All: The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.**

Every spirit crushed God will save;

Will be ransom for their lives;

Will be safe shelter for their fears,

And will hear the cry of the poor.

**All: The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.**

We proclaim your greatness, O God.

Your praise ever in our mouth;

Every face brightened in your light,

For you hear the cry of the poor.

**All: The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.**



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<sup>4</sup> Psalm 34. Text: Ps 34 : 2-3, 6-7, 18-19,23. John Foley SJ. © 1978, 1990, John B Foley SJ & new Dawn Music. Used with permission. Australian Agent: Word of Life International. Licence 527.

<sup>5</sup> CFA Fire fighter, Mudgeeongga. Picture: David Caird, Herald Sun Gallery

<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/gallery>

**OPTION 2 Psalm 146(147)** <sup>6</sup> (said or sung: see *Gather Australia 84*)

Psalmist: Bless the Lord, my soul, who heals the broken hearted.

**All: Bless the Lord, my soul, who heals the broken hearted.**

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem,

Chant praises to your God.

The strength of God is your fortress sure,

And blessed are your children.

**All: Bless the Lord, my soul, who heals the broken hearted.**

All praise to you, O gracious God, your goodness fills the earth.

You raise anew Jerusalem,

And gather all your lost ones.

**All: Bless the Lord, my soul, who heals the broken hearted.**

You heal the hurt and broken heart,

You bind up every wound,

You number all the stars of night and call each one by name.

**All: Bless the Lord, my soul, who heals the broken hearted.**

The peace of God shall be your hope,

God's finest wheat, your food,

The word of God fills all the earth,

As rapid as the whirlwind.

**All: Bless the Lord, my soul, who heals the broken hearted.**

**OPTION 3 Psalm 91** <sup>7</sup> (said or sung: see *Gather Australia 53*)

Psalmist: Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble. Be with me, Lord, I pray.

**All: Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble. Be with me, Lord, I pray.**

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord, most high,

Who abide in the shadow of our God,

Say to the Lord, "My refuge and fortress,

The God in whom I trust."

**All: Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble. Be with me, Lord, I pray.**

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 146/147 Text: Ps 147: 12-13, 1-2, 3-4, 14-15, Marty Haugen. © 1987 GIA Publications. Used with permission. Australian Agent: Word of Life International. Licence 527.

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 91 Text: Ps 91:1-2, 10-11, 14-15, Marty Haugen. © 1980 GIOA Publications, Inc. Used with permission. Australian Agent: Word of Life International. Licence 527.

No evil shall befall you, no pain come near,  
For the angels stand close by your side,  
Guarding you always and bearing you gently,  
Watching over your life.

**All: Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble. Be with me, Lord, I pray.**

Those who cling to the Lord live secure in God's love,  
Lifted high, those who trust in God's name,  
Call on the Lord who will never forsake you,  
God will bring you salvation and joy.

**All: Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble. Be with me, Lord, I pray.**

## **GOSPEL**

*A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 11:25-30)*

Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'

'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

The Gospel of the Lord!

**All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!**

## **Words of Reflection or Silence**



## **Ritual Action**

**OPTION 1:** *As a remembrance of those who have died, been burned, or have lost their homes, property and animals, you are invited to come forward to light a taper from the Christ Candle and place it in the bowl of sand ... we will add our prayer to yours.*

**OPTION 2:** *As a remembrance of those who have died, been burned, or have lost their homes, property and animals, you are invited to come forward to place some flower petals into the bowl of water... we will add our prayer to yours.*

**OPTION 3:** *As a remembrance of those who have died, been burned, or have lost their homes, property and animals, you are invited to come forward to place a flower (or paper heart with family name) at the foot of the cross ... we will add our prayer to yours.*

Sing or play some Taizé chant music during the ritual action:

*Bless the Lord My Soul*

*O Lord Hear My Prayer*

*Jesus Remember Me*

*Stay With Me*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Leader: As we gather to remember the dead, the burned, and the homeless, let us ask God to light up the lives of all people who live in the darkness of grief and loss.

Reader 1: For all who have died in the bushfires, that they may rest now, safe in the loving arms of God. Together , we pray .....

**All: Lord, be our light and our salvation!**

Reader 2: For all who grieve for their loved ones, that God will wipe away their tears and give them consolation and peace. Together , we pray

.....

**All: Lord, be our light and our salvation!**

Reader 3: For the wounded and the bereft, who are suffering, that God will comfort them and heal them in body and spirit. Together , we pray

.....

**All: Lord, be our light and our salvation!**

Reader 4: For all those who so courageously are fighting the bushfires, that they may be protected and kept safe from harm. Together , we pray

.....

**All: Lord, be our light and our salvation!**

Reader 5: For all those who work to rescue the injured, tend the dead and take care of the survivors, that God grant them strength to continue their work.

Together , we pray .....

**All: Lord, be our light and our salvation!**

Reader 6: For the communities who have felt the effects of the bushfires, that they may be supported and helped by the concern and the practical care that we can offer them. Together we pray .....

**All: Lord, be our light and our salvation!**

Reader 7: For our state Victoria and our nation, that God grant us wisdom and compassion as we respond to this tragedy. Together we pray .....

**All: Lord, be our light and our salvation!**

Reader 8: For ourselves and our local community, that God protect us from all harm, that God give us strength to bear our sorrow and heal our broken hearts.

Together we pray .....

**All: Lord, be our light and our salvation!**

Leader: Consoling God, source of all comfort, lift the burden of despair and grief from those who suffer. Enkindle in us the hope of your Spirit. Show us how you want us to live and give us the courage and the goodness to reach out to others in their distress. Do not abandon your people in their time of need. We ask you this in the name of the One who knew suffering and loss, Jesus Christ our Lord and brother

**All: Amen**

### **Practical Support**

*You may wish to take up a collection at this point. Consider providing cards with phone numbers and websites of the fire relief funds either in your locality or the Victorian Bushfire relief (Red Cross).*

### **Lord's Prayer**

Leader: Let us pray with confidence to the Father in the words Jesus gave us.

**All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth,  
as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who  
trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.**

Leader: Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, and grant us peace in our day.  
In your mercy keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety  
as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour,  
Jesus Christ.

**All: For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever.**



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<sup>8</sup> Grieving farmer. Picture: Gary Richardson, Herald Sun Gallery  
<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/gallery>

### Prayer for Peace

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles:  
I leave you peace, my peace I give you.  
Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church,  
and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom  
where you live for ever and ever.

**All: Amen.**

Leader: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

**All: And also with you.**

Leader: Let us offer each other the sign of peace.....

### The Passing of Peace

*Greet those around you with a sign of peace and compassion*



### Prayer For Those Present

Hold our hands, Lord.  
Walk us through the pain  
and the valley of our sorrows.  
Hold on to us when we are too afraid  
to think about the future.  
Let us lean on you, Lord,  
when we're too weary to continue.  
Hold our hands, Lord, through the night  
until we see the light of dawn.  
We ask this through Jesus your Son,  
the one who knows what it is to suffer.

**All: Amen**

### **Prayers of Commendation**

Leader: We commend the souls of those who have died into the loving embrace of their Creator. We commend into God's care, the wounded, the broken and the heartsick.

Leader: All our shock, all our denial

**All: Safe now in God's hands**

Leader: All our anger, all our disbelief

**All: Safe now in God's hands**

Leader: All our grief, all our tears

**All: Safe now in God's hands**

Leader: All our stories, all our memories

**All: Safe now in God's hands**

Leader: Those we remember, those we love

**All: Safe now in God's hands**

Leader: Blessed are those who have died so tragically;  
Their good deeds go with them.  
Eternal rest grant to them, Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine upon them.  
May they rest in peace.

**All: Amen**

Leader: May the souls of all those who have died, through the mercy of God,  
rest in peace.

**All: Amen**

Leader: May the love of God and the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ  
bless and console us  
and gently wipe every tear from our eyes:  
+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**All: Amen**



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<sup>9</sup> New growth after fire. Picture: [blog.allthedumbthings.com/2007/12/](http://blog.allthedumbthings.com/2007/12/)

## Reflection on the Gospel <sup>10</sup>

Once again this week, as people of faith, we are moved to try and make sense of the terrible bushfires that have ravaged our State.

Some things that happen are easy for us to understand. Losing a part time job, breaking our leg in a motor bike fall, the death of a grandparent... these events, though hard, are reasonable, logical and even natural in a way. They can be studied and known, and their affects can also be analysed so that we can learn how to adapt to, and cope with them ever more effectively.

But, as people of faith, we acknowledge that tragic events happen for no apparent reason (the earth's plates move in an earthquake, cells mutate and multiply and become cancerous, nature itself seems to turn against us in floods and fire... untimely death is all around us). But it is our **response** to these events, our compassion and an ever expanding sense of belonging to the human family - that identifies us as authentic people of faith.

What we know from the Scriptures is that God does have favorites – the poor, the marginalized and the most vulnerable are always and everywhere preferred by God and preferred by Jesus. And so our faith, our sense of belonging to the Church and to the human family, moves us to demonstrate God's love for the poorest of the poor, those pushed to the brink. And we do this through our generous giving of ourselves and our deep solidarity with their pain.

Our generosity to those we know who have been affected by the fires is making a difference today and will continue to make a difference in the coming weeks and months as the emphasis in the work shifts from intense crisis to more long term reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Each of us can make a difference, through our financial generosity or through our tenderness towards those whom we know have been affected. We can keep the fire fighters in our prayers and be gentle with ourselves as we come to terms with what has happened.

Together and with God's help, we can make the burden easier.

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<sup>10</sup> By Michael Hansen, Director of Faith and Ministry, Lavalla Catholic College, PO Box 1080, Traralgon, Victoria 3844.