



## Victorian Council of Churches Emergencies Ministry Newsletter

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*Suffering is not what destroys people, rather "suffering without meaning".  
(Victor Frankl)*

A Bi Monthly Newsletter

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## North East Flood Crisis - VCC EM Response

On the 4th March 2012, the VCC Emergencies Ministry was contacted by the Emergency Management team of the Department of Human Services Hume Region, asking for Personal Support Workers to respond to the flood crisis.

Teams of volunteers were deployed from across the region including recently trained people from Anglicare, Wangaratta.

At the height of the flood crisis, we were asked to place two volunteers into Katamatite (which was still inundated) at a special request by the Moira Shire Mayor. Craig Campbell (Asst. State Manager) and Robert Hough (Shepparton Area Coordinator) were transported with two DHS grants officers in a CFA 4WD to Katamatite where they provided Personal Support to



**Numurkah Levee Bank 2012**

many local residents. Rev. Kim Benton of Numurkah, (Moira Area Coordinator), also supported Nathalia at the height of the floods by visiting the town everyday.

**As at the end of April 2012, the VCC EM has deployed over 110 individual volunteers. We have conducted over 240 days of service and supported more than 3500 affected individuals.**

Now that the relief and recovery process is complete, the system has moved into outreach. The VCC EM has committed to providing outreach for the next eight to twelve months. This involves teams door knocking affected homes in the towns and rural areas of the Shire, seeking to support those families where necessary and referring on to other services as required.

**PLEASE VOLUNTEER TO SUPPORT FLOOD AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN THE NORTH EAST.**

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## NE Floods Cont.

The NE Floods posed a number of challenges in relation to the management of volunteers across multiple sites.

The recent introduction of Incident Activity Coordinators (IAC's) proved to be invaluable during this time.

The flood area was broken up into three sectors; Wangaratta, Cobram and Shepparton. Wangaratta was spared major flooding and so resources were soon pushed west to support towns like Yarrowonga, Katamatite, Wilby, and Tungamah.

Terry Mervin coordinated the Cobram relief centre and included Katamatite, Yarrowonga, Tungamah area.

Debbie Laphorne coordinated the Shepparton / Numurkah area, including Kialla, Tallygaroopna, Congupna, Numurkah and Nathalia relief centres. **In total, 13 towns were directly supported by VCC EM.**

IAC relief support was provided by John Davis, Denis Martin, Rosie Baker and Hea Chin Tan. Having competent and capable people who could step in to relieve tired and weary Coordinators was an enormous benefit to the continuity of service delivery.

Thank you to all our managers for their tremendous support and commitment.

Now that we have moved into outreach, the appointment of John Randles as a dedicated outreach coordinator (with his dedicated admin team) has meant that the Shire and DHS have had one contact point for the VCC EM operations. John who has been supported by Hea Chin Tan and Debbie Laphorne have been negotiating and developing plans for outreach with the Moira Shire.

All of his work was also supported administratively by Megan Griffiths (Melbourne), Margaret Brickhill (Wangaratta), Margaret Huggins (Woodend) and so many others.

Hea Chin Tan volunteered two days per week to come into head office and support the work administratively - an amazing support.

Many faith community residents in and around the flood affected areas opened their doors and accommodated volunteers. They have contributed significantly to this ministry by welcoming our volunteers into their homes. For that we thank you.

**Over 800 homes have been visited by a VCC volunteer since Outreach began early April.**

**THE FLOODS ARE NOT YET OVER!!!!**

We need people who can spare a couple of days here and there, or a week here and there to volunteer for outreach.

Please call Martin West on 9650 4511 or email [mwest@vcc.org.au](mailto:mwest@vcc.org.au).

**ENCOURAGE PEOPLE IN  
YOUR FAITH  
COMMUNITY TO TAKE  
UP TRAINING AND BE A  
PART OF THIS VITAL  
SUPPORT TO THE  
COMMUNITY!!!**

**Call 9650 4511 for further  
details**

[www.vccem.org.au/training](http://www.vccem.org.au/training)



Yarrowonga Landscape 2012



## The experience of volunteering during the flood crisis.

*Hea Chin Tan, a recent trainee of the VCC EM describes her experience of volunteering in Relief and Recovery centres and undertaking Outreach in the Moira Shire.*

### My Experience as a first time volunteer for VCC Emergencies Ministry

Following the devastating floods in northern Victoria early 2012, VCC gave my church friends and I opportunities to support the community in Relief Centres and in Outreach in the flood affected areas around Shepparton and Yarrawonga.

We went with trepidation even though we had been trained as Level 1 Community Chaplaincy in October 2011. But we were supported by prayers from our church, Full Gospel Assembly Melbourne. Under the guidance of more experienced volunteers we settled into the job at hand in a matter of hours.

The first deployment was to Relief Centres in community halls with DHS (Department of Human Services) desk, Shire desk and sometimes Centrelink desk, we assisted with making sure the services were orderly, greeting the local community as they filed in and if time permitted chatted about how the flood affected their homes, lives or businesses.

The second deployment was Outreach - door knocking in streets identified and directed by Shire officers to inform residents of the help available to them

and to listen to them articulate how the floods affected them personally.

When I reflect on the personal support works over the past weeks, the value that VCC Emergencies Ministry delivered to the community (and the agencies) is impressive. Here are some anecdotal examples:

- the act of volunteers introducing local residents to the officers of each desk in a Relief Centre delivered a professional respectable first impression, they may have lost to the floods but they still have their dignity.
- offering drinks and listening ears while the residents were waiting for the desks delivered compassion to those who have suffered losses, added a caring component to local government services, defuse some anger before their turns at the desks.
- volunteers in Outreach performed tasks like PR (public relations), one-to-one communications for the Shire, received and defused anger and frustrations on what the Shire should have done before the floods.
- the Outreach data collected provided the most up-to-date comprehensive information to the Shire for planning resources to re-build the community.
- identified and alerted the agencies of the most at-risk residents who needed help urgently (critical input to effective early intervention measures).
- everyone in a small community is affected even if their homes were not inundated. Mobility was restricted by road closures, supplies were depleted and most of all some form of community self-help expended (or not expended) resulted in varying

degrees of trauma. VCC volunteers served as gauges to affirm normality and encourage residents to take the next steps to move on and re-build by accessing assistance from the Shire.

I commend the VCC Emergencies Ministry for their good works and I will continue to support them with my prayers and a modest giving of my time.

May God who has called us to love our neighbours, equip VCC to serve the people of Victoria through the faith communities in that capacity.

HeaChin Tan  
Full Gospel Assembly Melbourne  
15 April 2012



## Training & Development

The 2012 Training Schedule has been released.

**To view training dates and register, please go online at [www.vccem.org.au](http://www.vccem.org.au) and go to Training page. There you will find these dates and the registration process.**

It is recommended that people refresh their training every two to three years. Many volunteers have not had the opportunity to respond to an emergency or disaster and therefore not had to use their training. It is also true that disaster information develops over time and the VCC EM is always updating and adding new material to the training package.

Contact Craig Campbell regarding training options and venues.

9650 4511

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## Further Impressions - Craig Campbell

We are delighted that the language "Emotional Spiritual Care" now appears in the official government Emergency Relief Handbook to describe the work of VCC EM, under the descriptor Personal Support and alongside Psychological First Aid.

Without doubt our work is spiritual – helping people work through the big life questions that arise as individuals are impacted by disaster: Why? Why me? Why not me? What may I hope for? The structures of meaning and the patterns that have given safety and predictability in life are disturbed. Disasters are a spiritual event for the people affected.

Particular religions shape rituals and symbols that adherents to that religion can find enormously helpful, including in disasters. However not all people affected are religious. Also the Victorian community contains a vast range of religious identities. Hence our approach in Emotional Spiritual Care is open primarily to the spiritual and emotional impact on people affected by disaster, and becomes a religious response only when requested by the affected person.

This means, for example, in the disaster recovery setting we do not ask to pray with a person. In some cases it could be experienced as quite abusive to do so. However if an affected person asks us for prayer we look for the best way in which to pray with them: "What would you like to pray about?" "How do you pray?"

And for a person of very different tradition we might also ask: "Do you wish me to find someone of your faith tradition to work with you?"

This principle applies to other significant religious rituals as well – respond to the request of the affected person rather than

impose our practice upon them, and do our best to offer the most suitable response available to us.

To impose a religious practice, even by asking permission first, is inappropriate because to do so:

1. Undermines the essential nature of our ministry of 'presence', where we are simply available to the affected person, where they set the agenda;
2. Could be offensive, even abusive for a person of a different faith;
3. We jeopardise our acceptance within the emergency recovery space - we are only ever present through the invitation of the authority in charge of the recovery; we must always avoid even the appearance that we are there to proselytise or convert;

When asked we respond with an appropriate religious ritual or find a person better suited to do so.

As we work in this way we are truly available to the general population of Victoria, on the terms of each affected person. This is our ministry of presence. Disaster can never be used by us to impose our particular religious practice.

In the meantime, we make ourselves ready. Our website [www.vccem.org.au](http://www.vccem.org.au) lists training opportunities, including excellent events delivered by DHS.

Craig Campbell, D Min Studies.



## Multi-faith Project

In April VCC Emergencies Ministries trained a group of volunteers that included four Buddhist nuns, three Buddhist monks, a Muslim imam, a Hindu chaplain, and a Buddhist layperson as well as several Christian ministers and laypeople. One of the Buddhist volunteers has since been doing outreach visits in northern Victoria. This has been just one more step in our journey as a multifaith program.

Victoria is the most culturally and religiously diverse state in Australia, and my role as Multifaith Project Officer is to work to build a volunteer base that reflects this. In June we will begin running training days in Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu temples around Victoria. While the training days will be targeted at these communities, they will be open to all. We are also building relationships with the Islamic Council of Victoria, the Buddhist Council of Victoria, the Hindu Communities Council of Victoria, and the Sikh Interfaith Council. We will be contributing to the training of Hindu and Buddhist healthcare chaplains so they emerge with dual qualifications, both as healthcare volunteers and as emergency volunteers.

This is a learning experience for VCC Emergencies Ministry. The forum we held in Kinglake had a multifaith component, and this month the Islamic Council of Victoria is running an information session for us. What we have learned is that the other

faith communities are overwhelmingly keen to engage with us and work alongside us. The response from our Christian volunteers has also been overwhelmingly positive, with people very happy to train and deploy with other faith traditions.

To find out more about these cultural and religious seminars, please contact Martin West on 9650 4511 or [mwest@vcc.org.au](mailto:mwest@vcc.org.au)



## Kinglake Forum

On a sunny April day twenty volunteers gathered at Kinglake for a forum on the Black Saturday bushfires. Sister Margaret from the Catholic church, Buddhist nun Chikwang Sunim, and Bev Johns from the Uniting Church of Australia spoke about the role of their faith communities in rebuilding their community after the deadly bushfire.

Sister Margaret Ryan, Venerable Chikwang and Bev spoke in turns about their experiences on the day of the bushfires and in the time since. All emphasized the long term impact of the bushfires.

All spoke of the central role of their faith in responding to the disaster, both on the day and in the months and years since.

"Without the prayer on the day [of the bushfire], without the stilling of the mind, I wouldn't have functioned," Venerable Chikwang said, "Prayer is so important".

"The problem was it was too big for anyone," Sister Margaret said about the weeks after. "I just did what was in front of me each day, and in the evening gave it back to the Lord".

Most of the volunteers who participated in the forum had experience of emergencies, and there was active discussion throughout the day.

*VCC Emergencies Ministry is deeply grateful to Sister Margaret, Venerable Chikwang Sunim, and Bev Johns for facilitating the forum.*



## Research

*New research is emerging related to the benefits of providing an holistic broad based psycho-spiritual care framework for disaster trauma affected individuals and communities*

*Mazlow's Hierarchy of Needs - a new paradigm!*

In the 1960's, Abraham Mazlow established his theory of basic human needs. A relatively recent discovery of further writings by Mazlow has serious implications for emergency management policy with regard the person and community platform.

Firstly, Mazlow's theory was developed in the context of individualism in the United States of America. Applying Mazlow's theory of basic human needs across culture, particularly a culture which does not base its values on individualism is problematic.

Hofstede (1983) drew comparisons of individualism and collectivism in his study of national cultures. He says that in a collectivist society, people are born into extended families who protect the family in exchange for loyalty. In an individualist society, people are supposed to take care of their individual selves and immediate family. In a collectivist society a 'we' consciousness holds sway, whereas in an individualist culture, an 'I' consciousness holds sway.

Finally, in a collectivist culture, emphasis is placed on belonging to organisations where membership is ideal. In an individualistic society, the emphasis is on individual achievement and initiative and where leadership is ideal (The Journal of Management and Entrepreneurship 2003 Vol 8 p 146).

Mazlow's hierarchy was simply an explanation of what was taking place in the world at the time (Nevis 1983 in Hofstede p152). Mazlow implies a self actualizer is a person who is intelligent, very capable and accomplished, like former presidents, dignitaries and great discoverers. It is limited in its flexibility with regard to people emotionally regressing, especially in the context of trauma. Another limitation

involves self esteem. The hierarchy doesn't always follow in sequence with how it was intended. If the notion of self-esteem, for example, is thought to develop in children as early as two years of age, then why does Maslow address esteem needs so high up in the hierarchy pyramid?

The Chinese culture would be best described as a collectivist society, and there would be many others also. Collectivist cultures often prefer to have "Belonging" as the basic human need over physical elements like shelter, food, and water.

Belonging is a strong social imperative. In a disaster or emergency context, social support is a critical social resource central to individual and community wellbeing (van den Ende and Venro in Gist 1999 p 174).

People need the support of others in order to feel connected to themselves and importantly to others exposed to trauma. Feeling connected to another who has experienced a similar event helps to normalize the person's symptoms.

A traumatic event can cause a person to distrust others and withdraw from close social relationships, yet at the same time require protective attachments. A traumatized person therefore alternates between isolation and anxious clinging to others (Herman, 1997 p 56). People need to belong to someone and something.

Hawdon and Ryan (2011 p 1366) state, "evidence suggests that survivors embedded in strong social networks suffer fewer tragedy induced symptoms than do those who are less socially supported". And Gordon (2004) says that people are usually so disoriented that they are grateful for intensive (*emotional*) care in the first few days.

From a place of belonging, people are able to obtain and attain all of the other elements simultaneously. If I belong, I can feel safe and secure. If I belong, I can have my physiological needs met. If I belong, I have my social needs met and therefore my self esteem which allows me to consider who I am and what this event means to me in a safe environment.

A person, who has experienced some kind of traumatic event and presents to a relief or recovery centre, does so as a 'fully formed' individual. In this fully formed state, they may have multiple needs to be met – food, clothing, shelter, psycho spiritual support. These needs cannot be compartmentalized into a hierarchy based on part of a model still under construction and which pertains to a particular cultural context. A dilemma with Mazlow's theory is that it assumes each level/stage occurs independently of the other. Suggesting that a person requiring basic needs of food and shelter does not need to think about who they are or what the event means to them is short sighted.

In the later writings, Mazlow began to wrestle with a sixth stage of development, that being "self transcendence". Walsh (2003 p 64) states that "Transcendent beliefs provide meaning and purpose beyond ourselves and our immediate plight." She also says, "Suffering, and often the injustice of it, are ultimately spiritual questions."

Current policy developers and emergency management practitioners have used theoretical principles such as 'Mazlow's Hierarchy of Needs' to determine the kind of psycho-social-spiritual support affected persons might need and when best to implement that support.

The recently discovered material of Mazlow's theory of basic human needs challenges the way in which future policies and processes might be developed. The rectified version of Maslow's hierarchy of needs has several important implications for theory and research in personality and social psychology. It provides a basis for closer integration of the psychology of religion and spirituality into both personality and social psychology and a more multicultural integrated approach to psychological theory.

**The Rev Stuart Stuart - State Manager**