

World Environment Day 2020: Bushfire Prayer

God our comforter,

Who walks with us through fire, flood and drought.

We pray today, and every day, for those impacted by the ferocious bushfires this last spring and summer.

We pray for those who have lost lives, family members, homes, businesses, towns and forests.

We pray for those who have lost a sense of safety, those who have lost places of refuge and comfort, and those for those for whom familiar landscapes which were once beautiful and calming now evoke memories of fear and hurt.

We pray for the difficult work of cleaning up the damage done, which in many places is just beginning, and for the rebuilding still to come in the months and years ahead. We recognise the delays caused by COVID restrictions, and the additional pain and trauma of having to deal with multiple crises at once, especially for those living temporary accommodation.

We pray that these people and communities might know they are not alone, and we have not forgotten them.

We are conscious of the great harm caused by the bushfires.

We think of the estimated 445 people, medical experts now tell us died from inhaling smoke from the fires. We think of the 3,000 people admitted to hospital with respiratory problems, and the 1,700 who struggled to breathe because of asthma*, and those who couldn't protect themselves or their children from the smoke.

God you have breathed life into all the creatures of the world.

As we commemorate World Environment Day, and the theme of biodiversity this year, we remember the billions of animals and insects burned to death by the fires, those starved to death in burned landscapes after the fires, and those now struggling to survive in limited remaining habitat, some of which continues to be logged. We pray for endangered species whose lives are now even more precarious because of the impact of these fires, and those newly made

endangered or extinct by them. We thank you for the sobering but careful work of scientists who strive to measure the full impacts of these fires on our land and its creatures.

Holy God, we sometimes fear the future. We fear the approaching fire season, and the ones following. We fear because we know this wasn't a one-off freak event. We knew something like this was coming. We had been told of the risks. We acknowledge that as a society we have failed to heed the warnings of our scientists, over decades, that climate change would make our fire seasons more severe and longer lasting. We have failed to act in a timely manner to reduce our emissions, even though Australia is one of the most vulnerable countries in the developed world to climate change. In our sins of omission, we have failed not only ourselves, but our children and grandchildren, who now face a greater burden and more severe impacts of climate change because of our inaction.

But lord, you are a God of grace and the hope of new beginnings. We thank you for the incredible ways bushfire communities pulled together and looked after each other during the fires. We thank you for the leading roles our church communities and church people played in this. We thank you for the chaplains of the Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (DRCN), and for our leaders who worked to support those suffering.

We thank you that in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen again our capacity to come together as a community, to put aside differences, to listen to our scientists and other experts and work together to address a common threat. We have been willing to make sacrifices to protect the vulnerable and avert a greater harm. Help us now to bring this same resolve to the challenge of climate change.

We thank you that ultimately we know how to solve this problem. It's as simple, and as hard, as reducing the greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere. We thank you for people all around our country installing solar panels, reducing car use and eating less meat. We especially thank you for those who recognise that our faith calls us to action and who are working faithfully to care for creation and reduce their emissions. Give our governments grace and courage to act together for the common good. The time for division, denial and politicking is over. Give all of us the capacity to overcome differences and find common

ground. Now is the time to act. For those suffering. For those who will suffer if we do not act now. You have given us power and agency Lord, let us use it.

And so Lord, we commit to these two things:

1. To uphold in prayer, and offer what support we can, to those communities recovering from the bushfires
2. To act together to create a safer climate future for ourselves, our neighbours and all the creatures of this world that God has made and loves.

Be with us in these actions lord, and in all we do. Give us not peace but determination, and the will to see change.

We ask this in Jesus's name, Amen.

*Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-26/bushfire-royal-commission-hearings-smoke-killed-445-people/12286094?fbclid=IwAR2kEQqkEI3ZSnLRF-HX98qBUgD8rGf8ewp4ob70P5IQAHQmCjaNxfw7gnE>