



Victorian Council of Churches

Emergencies Ministry Update

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VCC Personal Support Involvement in the March Storm

On 6th March 2010, a violent and unprecedented storm swept through Melbourne and the Eastern suburbs. Massive hail and water damage affected more than 7900 properties, including a number of homes, which in some cases were damaged beyond repair. Unfortunately many residents were away for the long weekend and did not discover damage until late Monday.

The Knox Municipal Emergency Coordination Centre (MECC) was activated to organise response and recovery operations. SES crews responded to 2900 calls in Knox for assistance and required the support of 2010 volunteers, including 51 VCC Personal Support volunteers. The Centre was staffed by VCC representatives

for three sessions each day, they were tasked to meet and greet people, to provide them with the opportunity to tell their story and to identify those in need of further counsel.

Graeme Winterton, State Coordinator, says that, "due to the short notice it was difficult to find registered people able to respond. I turned to local clergy and several congregations did arrange some support. The Tzu Chi Buddhist group and Chaplaincy Australia were most helpful".

MECC personnel remarked on the professionalism and value of the VCC contribution to the overall operation. VCC team members from different denominations valued the opportunity to work together and commented on the personal satisfaction they received from the experience.



Victoria's psychosocial model for post emergency individual and community support

The Emergencies Ministry has been a part of the consultative process in the release of a revised personal support psychosocial model. VECN training has been updated and now includes the additional insights provided.

The revised model addresses issues of intake and needs assessment, service provision and coordination, counselling community and development. The model aims to ensure that personal support services are integrated into an overall recovery strategy and will form the basis of state personal support arrangements. It describes how personal support services will be coordinated at a state level and will inform regions in local government of key elements that need to be included in their particular recovery plans.

The History of The Victorian Emergency Chaplaincy Network:

'We have been helping people to mend broken vines. You, the church, have been mending broken spirits' – Department of Agriculture Representative

The beginnings of the Victorian Emergency Chaplaincy Network (VECN) started in 1977, when severe hailstones, not unlike those of 6th March, destroyed property and crops in Red Cliffs and Irymple. The Uniting Church clergy responded by dividing into teams to visit the affected areas and bringing much needed hope and relief to the local community.

The Revd John Hill, a Uniting Church minister, communicated the importance of the church's role in emergency response at the national level and received funding from the government to conduct training and courses interstate. This would equip emergency ministry with the skills to respond to major catastrophes like Ash Wednesday in 1983.

In 1993, the Department of Human Services and various churches, decided that the VCC would be the designated body for emergency response. This opened up the Emergency ministry so that more responsibilities could be given to regional coordinators and included members of all faiths. In 1996, the DHS requested that the VCC develop a capacity plan to respond to the Commonwealth Games.

In recent years, VCC volunteers and community chaplains have played an important role in responding to catastrophes such as Black Saturday and the violent storms last month.



Q & A with Rosie Baker, VCC Personal Support Regional Coordinator

Tell me about what you do as a Regional Coordinator for VCC?

As a Regional Coordinator my main task has been recruiting people as Area Coordinators in the Loddon Region. I try to offer them lots of help in the task of setting up a database of volunteers from the churches in their Shires. I also attend recovery meetings with the DHS as well as meet with Shire Emergency Response workers. Starting as an Area Coordinator has helped a lot as I still have great support from the Macedon Ranges shire.

How and why did you volunteer?

In 2006 I got involved when a fellow post-councillor introduced the Emergency Ministry leaflet but didn't follow up. Graeme Winterton came to Macedon Ranges to talk about volunteering and there were only four volunteers at that time. Now there are 120 trained volunteers in Macedon Ranges and over 200 in Loddon. I guess God is calling me.

Were you involved in Black Saturday?

Yes in the week following Black Saturday I took 70 Macedon Ranges volunteers to help people affected by the fires in Murrindindi. We helped people with things like places to sleep and provided cages for their pets as well as listening to their stories. In Macedon Ranges we also helped the Shire with a door knock in Redesdale.

What do you get most out of volunteering?

I get a sense of purpose doing something worthwhile and the satisfaction of working with lots of great people.

Any words of wisdom for fellow volunteers?

Just to persevere in doing what you can.