

REFLECTION BY BISHOP JOHN HARROWER

ECUMENICAL SERVICE

**FOR ALL THOSE AFFECTED BY THE BUSHFIRES IN
VICTORIA**

Thursday 12 February 2009

At times like this, of intense and immense tragedy there are no
clever words or phrases

No catchy media bites;

Just hearts heavy with sorrow

Heavy with sorrow of so much loss, so much suffering

As so many Australians sit around in tents,
trying to hit a cricket ball,
or holding onto hope against hope for loved ones for finding the
names of neighbours, friends and family on the paper lists of
community notice boards

We Lament

We lament that which is lost
We lament that which we had and no longer have
We lament that which we held, and no longer hold
We lament that which we embraced and no longer embrace

We lament the loss of place

Of Mansfield and its snow fields and autumn leaves
Of Kinglake and its rugged beauty
Of Gippsland and its forests
Of Bendigo and its eucalyptus lined hills
Of Ingham and its Queensland summer
Of so many places dear to our hearts

But more, we lament the loss of persons

The loss of persons we had and no longer have
The loss of persons we held and no longer hold
The loss of persons we embraced and no longer embrace

We lament the loss of loved ones, communities

We lament because all Australia has lost

Has any Australian not lost? – NO!

WE HAVE ALL LOST

In our own family we have lost 2 dear beautiful young friends:

Their last entry in the Guest Book for our new home reads:

“Nice and comfy and hospitable ☺ - Thanks heaps John and Gayelene!! Love Melanie and Penny”.

Guest books	become treasures
Photos	become treasures
Memories	become treasures
Cards and letters	become treasures

We lament
And yet we continue in love and hope

We continue in love and hope because
We believe in tomorrow
We believe in regeneration
We believe in resurrection
We believe in God who is with us.

Looking at the cross of Jesus;
at Jesus, God with us, who experienced our human suffering
Who is with us in our loss of loved ones and loved places

Driving to the Cathedral this morning on the Southern Outlet I
passed the eucalyptus trees that were burnt some years ago but
which are now regenerating.

In Jesus' resurrection we are reminded powerfully that
there is hope,
there is tomorrow and
God is with us.

I see the presence of God in the love, self-sacrifice, and generosity of family members, neighbours, friends and strangers.

I see the presence of God in
the emergency services' personnel,
the police,
the chaplains,
the counselors and
the fire fighters, risking their lives to protect and preserve the lives
and property of people they do not know and of Australians for
whom their love knows no limits

Such self-sacrifice carries God's heart.

God is with us in our heart broken lament of loss and pain.

And so, to God we come in hope, faith and love

Let us Pray:

God of mercy and pity,
remember all those suffering from the effects of bushfires.
Especially we ask for those who have lost loved ones, homes,
possessions.
Help us to minister to their needs
and to be sensitive to all who have suffered loss.
Heal the distressed, the broken-hearted and the wounded:
comfort and sustain them in their need.
Give them wise and faithful friends,
and courage for the road ahead.
Help the firefighters to bring the fires under control
And protect them at all times.
Sustain them, the support workers and all volunteers,
In their myriad tasks, sacrifices and generosity.
Watch over all those involved
And give them the assurance of your presence.

These things we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen