

CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF CANBERRA-GOULBURN

Press Release - Monday, January 20, 2003

Catholic Archbishop pledges prayers, assistance to fire victims

Catholic Archbishop of Canberra-Goulburn, Francis Carroll today pledged prayers and practical help to all those who lost loved ones and homes in the devastating ACT bushfires.

His comments came as the St Vincent de Paul Society in Canberra was to announce the launch of a special bushfire appeal.

"Our hearts and prayers go out to those who lost loved ones or who worry about those who were injured, as they do to all those who have lost homes and precious possessions," Archbishop Carroll said.

"As we stand in solidarity with their loss and pain, we promise to continue to support them in every way possible."

Archbishop Carroll said he and Bishop Pat Power visited evacuation centres over the weekend as well as local Catholic parishes affected by the fires.

He thanked emergency service workers and volunteers who fought the fires and organised crucial relief services.

"The response from the Canberra community has been generous and heart-warming, and offers of support and love have come from right across Australia," he said.

"Let us continue to pray and persevere in our efforts to support those who have suffered, in their struggle to come to terms with their horrific experience and rebuild in every way their lives."

Canberra-Goulburn president of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Russ Walls said the most pressing requirement to help fire victims now was cash.

"People have been tremendous over the past couple of days bringing in goods, but victims will need money to cover their immediate needs in the days ahead," Mr Walls said.

On Saturday, the society played its part in the ACT disaster plan by sending teams to each of the four evacuation centres around the city, as well as providing mattresses, blankets, pillows and toiletries.

The Catholic Church's welfare provider, Centacare also provided counselling to fire victims at the evacuation centres.

St Christopher's Cathedral in Manuka will be open for extended hours this week, from 6.30am to 10pm, to give Canberrans an extra time and place to pray.

For more information contact Debra Way on (02) 6201 9859 or (0414) 880 475.

