Working with Disaster: Clergy & Bushfires

Dr Lisa Jacobson

Launched by Craig Lapsley, Victorian Emergency Management Commissioner, this research aims to support and learn from the local clergy and laity in the Murrindindi Shire who responded to those affected by the trauma of Black Saturday, 9 February 2009. The fires caused Australia’s highest-ever loss of life from a natural disaster, claiming 173 human lives, injuring 5,000 people, and destroying 2,090 homes.

The author, Dr Lisa Jacobson, based her research on the reflections of clergy and pastoral workers involved during or after the fires. Helpers are also affected deeply, as well as being exposed to secondary trauma from their prolonged involvement with those directly affected.

Among its many recommendations, the report calls for opportunities for pastoral workers to prepare for such emergencies, not only with grief training, but also with the extra dimensions needed to respond.

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