

# FOREWORD

## Healing the wounds of a fractured community

by Rev. Canon Howard Dillon, Executive Director of ANGLICARE

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ANGLICARE, through its team of 1 500 trained volunteers, plays a key role in 'community recovery'—the restoring of social infrastructure in major emergencies

An elderly woman sits alone by a candle in darkness—she has been there for three days without power, with very little food, a leaking roof and water throughout her house.

Earlier that week – on Monday, August 17, 1998 – a severe storm hit her hometown of Wollongong. Torrents of water poured off the cliffs above the city, flooding through homes.

This was the first occasion ANGLICARE was able to mobilise trained teams of local emergency services volunteers to assist in disaster recovery.

So it was that two well-prepared ANGLICARE Emergency Services volunteers knocked on the elderly woman's door to offer help. Immediately a spark of light entered her isolated, lonely dark world.

In the years after the devastating Sydney bushfires of January 1994, ANGLICARE in Sydney had responsibility for coordinating the response and recovery effort of Anglican churches in NSW.

As a result of the bushfires and the Wollongong flooding, Emergency Services began its journey of involvement in major emergencies: to train, plan and provide volunteers and operational support for the NSW Disaster Recovery (Human Services) Plan as a Supporting Organisation,

providing relief for those directly affected.

By 2002, ANGLICARE, in partnership with the State Government, deployed 250 of its 1 500 trained volunteers from local Anglican parishes to support the victims of the January 2002 bushfires. Up to 100 volunteers were activated for the fires that continued from October.

More recently, the tragic Canberra fires of January 2003, created yet another opportunity for the local Emergency Services team in the ACT to support their community. These fires, in particular, have reinforced to us the key role ANGLICARE plays in assisting communities heal long after the flames have been quenched and the initial media attention has waned. Indeed disaster recovery is critical.

In all these operations, ANGLICARE teams continue to provide personal, pastoral and practical support to those affected by providing friendship, counselling, spiritual support, transport and distribution of donated goods plus other practical assistance.

Disasters create unique opportunities to respond with compassion, touching the lives of those affected with appropriate care and resources at a time of great need and vulnerability. The care we provide is holistic—taking into account the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of those we walk alongside.

We have also been involved in the provision of drought relief

assistance to NSW families in need of financial support through our *Archbishop of Sydney's Drought Appeal*; referrals to drought support staff; and participation at Farm Family Gatherings. Our collective experience has been that the direct involvement of parishes in active pastoral outreach is important to farm families and to small business families also directly affected by the economic downturn.

ANGLICARE is committed to the achievement of industry best practice in its planned response within the recovery management of major emergencies. The achievements so far underline the powerful potential of the Anglican community in responding effectively to those impacted by major emergencies and in the related recovery processes.

Effective response to emergencies is essentially about ordinary people doing ordinary things—in extraordinary circumstances. The Church is well placed to support and encourage both victims and those who seek to assist them—experience has shown that it really does work.

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Executive Director