



MEDIA RELEASE
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SUSAN PASCOE TO LEAD CATHOLIC EMERGENCY RELIEF AUSTRALIA

Susan Pascoe will today be named chair of the Catholic Emergency Relief Australia Advisory Council, which will coordinate the Church's ongoing response to the current bushfire crisis and future national emergencies.

Ms Pascoe's long list of contributions to public life includes serving as a 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commissioner and as the inaugural Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commissioner.

She said the Catholic Church has a significant role to play in helping people and communities respond to emergencies and to rebuild over a period of months and years.

"Catholic ministries exist in almost every Australian community and our people on the ground are keen to work alongside government agencies, emergency services and other faith-based and charitable organisations to respond now and into the future," Ms Pascoe said.

"The Church's key social services agencies, including CatholicCares and Centacares, are on the front lines finding people accommodation, providing financial assistance and helping address the mental and emotional scars that the bushfire have caused."

About 150 Catholic parishes and more than 200 Catholic schools are located in bushfire-affected areas.

"Our people – priests and parishioners, teachers and parents – understand deeply the impact of the fires on their families, friends and neighbours," Ms Pascoe said.

"The Church takes seriously its duty to respond to the needs of the whole community, and that can be done most effectively by harnessing its vast network of ministries."

Justice Terry Sheahan, a former New South Wales government minister and former judge on the NSW Land and Environment Court, and former CatholicCare Melbourne CEO Fr Joe Caddy, who led the Church's local response to the Black Saturday bushfires, will also serve on the Advisory Council.

Other members of the Council will represent key Catholic ministries: parishes, schools, social service agencies, religious congregations, hospitals and aged and community care services.

"On behalf of those national organisations, I express my sincere thanks to Susan, to Terry and to Fr Joe for undertaking this significant leadership task within the Church," Australian Catholic Bishops Conference president Archbishop Mark Coleridge said.

"Their wisdom and their passion for a Church that puts the Gospel into action will help guide Catholic Emergency Relief Australia down a path of measured, effective response and to a response that can bring a sense of hope to people who may be struggling to find it."

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Ms Pascoe said while CERA has its origins in the ongoing bushfire disaster, the new governance arrangements will allow it to be activated quickly for other devastating events.

“Clearly the bushfires will be a key discussion point at today’s inaugural meeting of the CERA Advisory Council, but we’ll also be discussing what role the Church might play in responding to the coronavirus and our preparedness to respond to future domestic emergencies,” she said.

Among the Advisory Council’s roles will be the consideration of applications for funding from Catholic organisations responding to emergencies. The allocation of grants will be published on the CERA website alongside other financial reporting.

“Transparency and accountability are critical and I will ensure that CERA adheres to the highest standards in the receipt and distribution of funds, as well as its other work to respond to current and future emergencies,” Ms Pascoe said.

Find out more about CERA at www.cera.catholic.org.au

