

# On the Scene

AUTUMN 2009 NEWS &amp; STORIES FROM THE SALVATION ARMY

SPECIAL REPORT • SPECIAL REPORT

## Victoria ablaze – caring at the coalface

The Salvation Army expresses its deepest sympathy, and extends heartfelt thoughts and prayers, to all those affected by the recent Victorian bushfires and North Queensland floods.

Veteran Salvation Army chaplain, Major Arthur Ford has counselled and supported many victims of tragedy over the years, including survivors of the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires.

Arthur currently serves as chaplain to State Emergency Services (SES) in Victoria. In this role, he supports emergency services personnel through disasters, rescues and body recovery, and thought he had seen the worst of emergency situations.

Yet, Victoria in February 2009 is a tragedy and an experience he will never forget. Looking into the shocked and exhausted faces, and smelling the injured, burnt flesh of emergency workers as they returned from fighting Australia's most destructive bushfires, Arthur could not stop his tears from falling.

Arthur is one of hundreds of Salvation Army officers, personnel and volunteers at 14 bushfire locations and emergency relief centres across Victoria who have been supporting communities devastated by the recent crisis.

This assistance has involved providing food and refreshments to thousands of fire fighters, emergency services personnel, and those affected by the fires, as well as providing chaplaincy support, emergency accommodation, clothing, toiletries and other material goods.

In the first seven days, thanks to the generous support of the Australian public, The Salvation Army distributed more than \$2.5 million in immediate financial payments to those affected.

Overall during the first week, 3,500 people were assisted by The

**RIGHT:** OFFERING COMFORT  
& A LISTENING EAR IS A VITAL PART  
OF THE CHAPLAINCY ROLE.  
& **INSET:** MAJOR ARTHUR FORD.



SHARON PATTERSON

Salvation Army. In the first four days at Whittlesea alone, The Salvation Army provided more than 12,000 meals.

Teams of chaplains have been working around-the-clock to provide emotional support.

Salvation Army court chaplain, Captain Alison Platt was called in to join the 24-hour chaplaincy support teams at the Whittlesea bushfire relief centre.

She says the chaplains have played many roles including organising material aid for those in need, but "offering a listening ear was so very important". This support will continue well into the recovery phase as people begin to return to whatever is left of their homes.

Alison says: "In the first few days we met evacuees as they came off the buses."

She says the team was careful not to intrude, as many people knew each other and were supporting each other. Others, however, definitely needed support: "There were so many heartbreaking moments, seeing desperate family members unable

to locate loved ones running up to each bus, only to be disappointed again and again. There were people who had waved to their neighbours with children [during evacuation], only to realise later that their neighbours must have delayed their departure and been killed.

"However," says Alison, "there were also beautiful stories. The support the community members were giving each other was amazing, and the joy of having people we had helped come back and throw their arms around us after finding their loved ones alive has been a great privilege." ○

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To give to The Salvation Army's Victorian Bushfire Appeal, please visit [salvos.org.au/bushfires](http://salvos.org.au/bushfires) or call 13 SALVOS (13 72 58).

# Queensland awash!

"The Gulf [of Carpentaria] is a disaster zone ... from all local reports this is the longest, largest and most severe flooding this region has endured in living memory ... It is not something we could have ever planned for or insured ourselves against. Approximately 100,000 acres of [our property] has been subjected to prolonged and extreme flood waters resulting in unknown stock and infrastructure losses ..."

FROM A RECENT E-MAIL TO THE SALVATION ARMY OUTBACK FLYING SERVICE IN NORTH QLD.

At the time of going to print, around two-thirds of Queensland had been seriously affected by torrential rains and flooding, with 36 council areas declared disaster zones.

Much of the state's sugar cane crop appeared to have been destroyed and graziers had been reporting almost unimaginable stock losses. Businesses, industries and much infrastructure had been seriously damaged by the floodwaters. Numerous properties and communities in Queensland's north remained isolated by floodwaters.

Ingham has been one of the worst affected towns, affected twice in two weeks by severe flooding.

A six-person **Salvation Army** Emergency Services (SAES) team was flown by helicopter into the Red Cross evacuation centre at the Ingham State High School to support evacuees and emergency services personnel by providing catering.

Captain Lincoln Stevens of The Salvation Army Townsville Faithworks church was part of the team. He says: "As we were flying in, the magnitude of the floods hit me – to see so many houses just inundated with water. I could see cows and sheep and I couldn't work out whether they were alive or if they were dead."

In less than two weeks, the team served more than 2,000 meals – preparing breakfast, lunch and dinner for at least 100 people each day including evacuated locals and emergency service workers.

Lincoln says: "Although the number of evacuees is now reducing, we still have a lot of SES, Fireys and helicopter pilots to feed, who are continually arriving from all over Queensland."

**BELOW:** MAJOR BRUCE HARMER OF THE SALVATION ARMY ON THE SPILLWAY IN TOWNSVILLE.

**& INSET, TOP:** THE SAES TEAM OF SIX THAT WAS FLOWN INTO INGHAM. **& INSET, BELOW:** MANY NORTH QUEENSLAND PROPERTIES HAVE SUSTAINED SIGNIFICANT STOCK LOSSES.



Major Glenda Hentzschel, SAES State Coordinator for Queensland, says: "The devastating floods in North Queensland have caused loss and heartache. The amount of homes under water is staggering. Our hearts and prayers go out to all those who have suffered.

"Emergency services personnel including the police and SES have been working 24 hours a day caring for those who were evacuated and our Salvation Army teams have been working hard to support them."

In recent weeks Envoy Simon Steele of The Salvation Army Outback Flying Service has been flying food and emergency supplies into rain-affected remote communities and properties, such as Urandangi (population 60), located almost 200km south-west of Mt Isa. However, increased rain and floodwaters have meant that many airstrips in remote communities have been inaccessible.

Simon and his wife Natalie together took on the role of Outback Flying chaplains in mid-2008. Simon is currently on call at Normanton (south of the Gulf of Carpentaria) delivering food and supplies to remote communities isolated by floodwaters. The State Emergency Services personnel requested he travel with them in a chaplaincy role while they conducted

food drops by helicopter, because they were concerned about the emotional needs of those experiencing the floods.

Envoy Natalie Steele says: "We are now getting reports of record water levels. One family we visit regularly north of Mt Isa said they usually get 26 inches of annual rain and they had already had 40 at the end of January. Like so many others, they are flooded in and their airstrip is under water.

"When he flies into Normanton, which is about 70 kilometres drive from the sea, Simon says that from the air it looks like the sea stretches all the way to the town, as there is so much land under water," says Natalie. ○

To give to The Salvation Army Flood Relief Appeal, please call **13 SALVOS (13 72 58)** or visit [salvos.org.au](http://salvos.org.au)

#### SALVO CARE LINE

For emotional support, or information about accessing practical assistance, call Salvo Care Line on **1300 36 36 22 (24 hours).**

