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Greek Orthodox Australian priest travels amidst the catastrophic fires to offer help to those in need



Watching Australia and its people experiencing one of the most devastating tragedies in the nation's history, Greek Australian priest Michael Psaromatis, 34, felt the need to help where he was needed most.

Last Friday, together with his wife Cynthia, the 34-year-old priest flew to Kangaroo Island hoping to assist with fire relief efforts.

"With the guidance of the local council members and local MP Leon Bignell, we were directed to the relevant relief centres where we had the opportunity to meet with people who had lost their homes, properties and livestock. Fire victims, CFS, SES, wildlife volunteers and all who are involved with the fire relief are shattered and weary, but most thankful that no more lives have been taken thus far," Fr

Michael told *Neos Kosmos*.

“We heard so many stories from the residents and did the best we could to offer some assistance and support to those who needed it. The day was a big eye opener and a blessing for all. We are really satisfied that we could offer our small assistance as well as overwhelmed, touched and humbled by the love we received by everyone we met.”

Kangaroo Island is geographically within the Greek Orthodox Parish of St Andrew Noarlunga.

Until recently, there had been no known – at least to the church – Orthodox Christians who resided there.

“A few years ago, we had enquired if there were any Orthodox Christians on Kangaroo Island, but we had got negative responses. Despite that, and given Kangaroo Island is geographically part of our Parish, we felt the need one week ago to send over bottled water and clothes, but as the fires worsened and people lost their lives we decided to go over and see if we can offer any hands on help to the relief centres,” Fr Michael said.

The closure of the SeaLink ferry service, reserved exclusively for emergency and military services, meant he was unable to travel to the island by sea. The Kingscote Airport reopened on Friday after an evacuation late Thursday evening due to the fire approaching Cygnet River.

Father Michael managed to get in contact with five Orthodox families who opened their homes, properties and businesses for a blessing. “The Orthodox families saw all of this as a big blessing especially given the recent fires. The non-Orthodox were also very happy. Some had never seen an Orthodox priest in their lives. They were appreciative of our parish’s efforts and the efforts of our Greek Orthodox Archdiocese through the national fire appeal which it has initiated,” Fr Michael said.

He held a Blessing of the Waters service at the Kingscote Fishermen Jetty, in the presence of the Kangaroo Island Council’s CEO Greg Georgopoulos, Mr Steve Harrison from the Council of Kangaroo Island and members of two of the Orthodox families on the island.

This was perhaps the first time, a Blessing of the Waters service and dive for the Cross ever took place in the area, with young Dimosthenis Belios retrieving the Cross. The service was accompanied with a prayer for the bushfires to stop, aid for the affected areas and prayers for those assisting with relief efforts.

The priest also had the opportunity to meet the Mr Georgopoulos to discuss future collaborations and a greater Orthodox presence in the effort to rebuild Kangaroo Island following the fires as well as future pastoral support for the people in the area; both Orthodox Christians and Non-Orthodox Christians alike.

“The community needs us, the island needs us and the people, irrespective of background or religious beliefs, need us so let’s do all that we can to raise funds and assist in every way we can,” Fr Michael said.

— Source: neoskopos.com