**Bushfires and The Climate Crisis: How do we make 2020 a transformative year for all Creation?**

Monday, 2nd March, 2020. 6.30 pm - 8.30 pm.

St Michael's Hall, 120 Collins Street, Melbourne.

Organised by: The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne and St Michael's Uniting Church

**In celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of the World Interfaith Harmony Week.**

Brief Report.

Special guest speakers plus fifty religious and community leaders, representing over ten religious and spiritual traditions, came together for a conversation about how faith communities are responding to the unprecedented bushfires in Australia over the past five months and the climate crisis. Raging bushfires have been brought on by droughts caused by climate change. Fires have been followed by floods. Over 46 million acres, an area bigger than Ireland have been burned. Thirty-five people lost their lives. The loss included 6,500 buildings and homes, and more than a billion animals. Toxic smoke engulfed country towns and cities.

As people of faith we discussed ways in which we can take action to care for all of Creation, mindful of our sacred texts, Love of God and Love of the Neighbour, Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour, which are found in all traditions.

**Rev Helen Summers OAM,** founder and director of The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne , introduced the special guests and afterwards invited the audience to contribute to the conversation.

**Special guests**:

**Dr Maureen Sier**, Director, Interfaith Scotland (who was visiting Melbourne), spoke of a personal story of her friends who live a few hours from Melbourne, who had lost everything. We learned about a Grove of Trees planted in the Highlands of Scotland for World Interfaith Harmony and the newly formed plans for faith leaders at the UNCOP26 meeting in November 2020 in Glasgow. Links have been made in the last week with Australian religious leaders who will organise retreats for stressed negotiators, diplomats and ministers.

**Rev Dr Margaret Mayman**, Minister of St Michael's Uniting Church, spoke about why people of faith should be concerned with climate change. She quoted a scientist who said that he thought thirty years of good science would solve environmental and climate change problems but he realised that the top environmental problems are: selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these problems we need cultural and spiritual transformation but scientists do not know how to deal with this transformation. This is where people of faith can help.

**Rev'd Glenn Loughrey**, Anglican Priest and Wiradjuri man, spoke about his people's care of the land for over 65,000 years, people who lived in small groups, who listened to the land and knew how to manage the land. He spoke how Aboriginal people experience all of creation alive with spirit. They are aware of kinship in all its forms and are able to interact with all surrounding them. As non-Aboriginal people we need to learn that all kinship is about respect. Today Aboriginal elders who understand fire management of the land can lead the way, but the vegetation, and the existing way of dividing the land with fences and building houses in dense bush areas is very different today from the past.

**Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black**, Rabbi at Leo Baeck Centre, spoke about three important areas: Transportation, Buildings and Transition.

We should think of using trains rather than flying short distances for example, take public transport instead of using our cars, buy an electric car or hybrid when changing our car. He spoke about eco-housing and new ways of building. Transition is an important area as we change to net zero carbon emissions. Transition needs to be transparent and communicated to all people to give confidence about the reliability of energy supply and to those people who are directly affected in regard to their employment and income security.

Rabbi Keren-Black spoke about ways we can join together with youth who are deeply concerned about climate change and their future.

**Rev Helen Summers** **OAM** invited the speakers to ask questions of each other and the audience to contribute to the conversation by asking questions and offering their comments. The evening concluded with thoughts of how we can change our habits in relation to climate change, how we can be more respectful of all creation, eat more plant-based foods and to keep up messaging our local and government leaders.