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**EASTER MESSAGE FROM DR PHILIP FREIER,
ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE**

EASTER ANSWERS THE QUESTION – WHERE WAS GOD?

There will be many, at this time, who feel traumatised by the recent series of natural catastrophes. As well as the devastating loss of lives, the hopes and dreams of many have been dramatically swept away, or have crumbled about them.

We have been remorselessly reminded in these events of the fragility and vulnerability of human life. Nature and its forces that we often see in a personal and friendly way are revealed as hostile and inhuman.

When we encounter such destructive natural forces and elemental power, which can make our human efforts at building a world of stability and comfort look feeble, we naturally ask, where is God?

But God is not a remote or uncaring God. God is the God of love and the God of compassion, who suffers our pain with us. This is what compassion means – to suffer with another. In the life of Jesus we encounter the true compassion of the God who is the infinite source of all love, and the very essence of love.

Jesus is a fellow sufferer who understands our pain, and suffered one of the most painful and agonising of deaths possible to imagine on Good Friday.

So, when we are haunted by the pictures of those who died or were badly injured in the natural disasters, I invite us all to believe in the Christian vision that God is there with them in their pain and anguish. And God is with all those who suffer – whether through natural disaster, or illness, or poverty.

God is present, too, in the selfless love and care of the rescue workers, the police, the hospital staff and paramedics – but also in all the heroism and self-sacrifice of ordinary people – neighbours, colleagues, family and friends; as well as the generous financial support shown by many.

Death, pain and suffering do not have the last word in the Christian vision. This is the meaning and joy of Easter. It does not end with Good Friday. The God who is love joins us in our suffering, not so that we can remain in it, but so that we can be liberated from it.

Easter Day is the day Christians celebrate Jesus' resurrection into new life, and God's great liberation of humanity from death, pain and suffering. St Paul said that nothing, in life or death, can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8.39). Easter is the great proclamation of this profound truth. Nothing, not tsunami, or earthquake, or flood, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Christ is Risen, Alleluia!