

2025 BCA Victoria Annual Report



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bush church aid



Going the distance

Strathfieldsaye Community Church Youth Camp at Point Lonsdale



Bishop Darrell Parker, Adrian Lane and Steve Weickhardt at the 2025 Victorian AGM

2025 in review

God was wonderfully gracious to Bush Church Aid Victoria in 2025. He answered many prayers, enabling us to promote the Society's ministry in rural, regional and remote Australia, so that we were able to make a significant contribution to it through our prayers, people, financial support and numerous other means.

I went to a boys boarding school, where many of my friends came from the bush. I spent every school holidays in the country, where it was so disheartening to see country churches with very little, if any, children's, youth or outreach ministry. These experiences have significantly shaped my subsequent ministry: please join with me in praying that kids, youth, young adults, and indeed all in the country, would hear of the forgiveness, love

and hope found through trusting in the life, death and resurrection of God's Son, Jesus Christ. As people come to know the love of Christ and His church, and grow as His disciples, they themselves become transformative in their local communities, becoming 'salt and light', and communities are changed.

In 2025 Bush Church Aid supported Field Staff in a wonderful range of ministries in every state and the Northern Territory. These included pastoral and evangelistic ministries in far-flung and isolated communities, where they were often the only minister or church. They also included church planting ministries in new communities, where the local Diocese doesn't have the resources to reach out. They included children's and schools ministry, new graduates ministry and Indigenous ministry. A particular feature of the Society's work was to provide a training pathway for those seeking to serve



in country locations: bursaries while at theological college, then training positions with experienced clergy. Another significant feature of the Society's work was its commitment to the training of Indigenous leaders through Nungalinya College in Darwin and the First Nations Ministry Training program based in Perth, under the auspices of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship.

As always, our greatest need is gifted people to serve. Please pray that God would be calling and equipping many for service in rural, regional and remote Australia. We had budgeted, for example, to support ministry in Ouyen, in the Victorian Mallee, but to date appropriate workers have yet to be found.

Victorian Field Staff

Specifically in Victoria, **The Revd Jude Benton**, together with

her husband **Andy**, continued to serve faithfully and creatively at Mallacoota, as the only minister at the only church in the community. Jude's ministry came to a end in February 2026, when she accepted a position as the Coordinator of Discernment and Formation in the Diocese of Adelaide, based at St Barnabas' College.

Jude served in Mallacoota for eight years, initially half-time, but after the devastating 2019–2020 summer bushfires, the Society provided support enabling her to serve full-time. In addition to teaching, pastoral and evangelistic ministries based in the small church community, Jude effectively became the Community Chaplain. She was elected to the town's rebuilding committee, served as a Police Chaplain and during the COVID pandemic held services on the community radio. Her radio ministry was so appreciated that after the

pandemic, she was invited to host a midweek program.

Jude is currently studying at post-graduate level the relationship between ministry and disasters, with a view to producing resources for others. Please pray for this and for both Jude & Andy as they settle into new work. We will greatly miss them.

We will also greatly miss **The Revd Jacob & Mrs Sarah Kelly** and their two young children, Theo and Josephine. Jacob has moved from his training position at St Andrew's, Kyabram, to join the ministry team at one of their partner parishes, South Wagga Anglican Church.

Jacob was initially supported by the Society in his theological studies at Ridley College, while serving half-time on the staff at Christ Church, Echuca. This period included the difficult

period of COVID and a lengthy time between rectors, during which Jacob made a crucial contribution.

Subsequently, as part of his training, Jacob moved to serve as the minister at Kyabram.

Sarah grew up in Wagga, and this move will mean they can reunite with family. Jacob & Sarah are keen to envision and train students at the university for country ministry: please pray that they will be fruitful in this vision in the years ahead.

In 2025, **The Revd Steve Weickhardt**, together with his wife **Vanessa**, also concluded service as Mallee Missioner, based at Red Cliffs. Steve served the parishes of Sunraysia South, Central Mallee and Robinvale, an extensive ministry that entailed much travelling and skill. Steve & Vanessa returned to



Left: Jude & Andy Benton Right: Sarah, Theo, Josephine & Jacob Kelly

their 'home base' at Bendigo, where Steve joined the Diocesan team and Vanessa returned to an administrative role at the Hospital. Steve's substantial experience across three Dioceses and his MBA studies have equipped him well for the role, and more recently he was appointed an Archdeacon.

Please continue to pray for Steve & Vanessa's fruitfulness, and the growth of the Diocese of Bendigo more generally.

The Revd Rob & Mrs Michelle Edwards continued to serve at Strathfieldsaye Community Church, a church plant on the edges of Bendigo.

It has been so encouraging to see the growth of this community, as it began to hold regular afternoon services and established children's, youth and young adults' ministry. BCA's financial support has intentionally been reducing as the church has been moving to self-sufficiency.

In this, they very much need our prayers: for replacement finances, more skilled leaders and, most particularly, the movement of the Spirit of God amongst the surrounding new housing areas.



*Top: Steve & Vanessa Weickhardt
Middle: Pete, Rob, Nathan, Michelle &
Josh Edwards
Bottom: 4pm Christmas Service in
Strathfieldsaye*

Nomads

During 2025 the volunteer leadership of the BCA Nomads passed on from Victoria's Greg & Jocelyn Lay to Rod & Amanda Haywood. Greg & Jocelyn have done an extraordinary job, especially during COVID, when movement around the country was brought to a standstill.

Greg & Jocelyn have worked hard to consolidate the ministry on a sound administrative base and organised significant Nomad gatherings for training, knowledge-sharing, prayer and fellowship. Together with Victorian Nomads Tim & Jill Buttle, Greg & Marion Creek, Alan & Suellen Crouch, Faye Donaldson, Iain & Ruth Johnson, Margaret Lister-Brown, John & Maree McAulay and Evelyn Mortimer, they continue to serve right across the nation in an exemplary and humble manner.



BCA Nomads in action



Adrian with Jo Varghese in Mildura

Preaching and Deputations

I am constantly encouraged by the support the Society receives from churches, individuals and trusts right across the state, and it was my great pleasure and privilege to preach and speak about the Society's mission on most Sundays throughout the year. For your interest and encouragement I list them here, to give some idea of the wide variety of support.

In the Diocese of Melbourne, I preached and deputised at: Bacchus Marsh, Balwyn, Berwick, Boronia, Camberwell (St Mark's), Caulfield North, Clayton, Corio-Norlane (including their Karen service), Cranbourne, Dingley, North

Dandenong, Panton Hill, Rowville and Ferntree Gully, Sandringham, Somerville and Sunbury. I also spoke at the Langwarrin Mission Group and at a Christian Fellowship Tour group.

I also preached and deputised at City on a Hill Ballarat, and in the Diocese of Bendigo at Bealiba/ St Arnaud, Kyabram, Ouyen & Red Cliffs. In the Diocese of Gippsland, I preached and deputised at Bass/Philip Island and Drouin, and at Sorrell and Southern Beaches in Tasmania.

The Victorian Office also facilitated others joining in the deputation task. The National Director spoke at the Ridley College Chapel and Ridley's Anglican Institute.



*Marinus & Hannah van Meerten together with their children
Samuel and Elianna*

Mr & Mrs Greg and Jocelyn Lay spoke at the Belgrave Heights Convention on Nomad Ministry and at Glen Waverley Anglican Church. The Revd Stephen May spoke at Barwon Heads/Ocean Grove. Bishop Darrell Parker spoke at Forest Hill.

Ms Emily Quinn spoke at two of her partner churches, Deep Creek and Newport. The Revd Matt Smith preached at Oaktree Caulfield, and Mr & Mrs Dave & Margie Williams spoke at Clayton.

I also regularly visited Ridley College's Mission Awareness Days, when representatives of various mission agencies speak with students and faculty about their work. I am delighted that Marinus van Meerten, who, with his wife Hannah, has recently been appointed as a BCA-supported training minister at San Remo in the parish of Bass/Phillip Island in the Diocese of Gippsland, attributes his interest in country service to what he heard at Ridley and from one of my deputations.



Adrian preaching at Bass

Events

Annual Meeting and Dinner

Our BCA Victoria Annual Meeting and Dinner was held on 3 May 2025 at Glen Waverley Anglican Church and was, as always, a great time of encouragement, learning and prayer

Our featured speakers were the Bishop of North West Australia, The Rt Revd Darrell Parker and BCA National Director, The Revd Canon Greg Harris. The Revd Steve Weickhardt also shared about his work. About 120 attended and Bishop Darrell was also able to preach at Forest Hill the next day.

Spring Gatherings

Our 12th annual Spring Gatherings with Topher Hallyburton was probably our best attended to date. Topher serves on the staff at Alice Springs Anglican Church, with substantial support from BCA.

Lunch meetings were held at Glen Waverley, Holy Trinity, Bendigo and St Mary's, Sunbury. A Young Adults Dinner was hosted by The Revd Trev and Mrs Cindy Bell in Bendigo, a supper was held at St James', Ivanhoe, and a dinner was held at Warragul



*Left: Scenes from the 2025 AGM
Right: Spring Gatherings 2025*

Events continued...

Anglican in the Diocese of Gippsland. Our deep thanks to each of the parishes involved, for their enthusiastic and generous hospitality: each provided their venues as part of their contribution to the Society's mission.

Kirkby Club Lunch

We also held a Kirkby Club Lunch on 25 March for former BCA Staff and Nomads at the Olde English Hotel in Heidelberg. This provided a happy occasion to thank those attending for their service and ongoing interest, to pray for the work and to share extraordinary stories! The National Director and I also updated those attending on the ministry.

Prayer

A very deep thank you to all those who regularly pray for BCA's ministry in all its facets. Can I encourage readers to use the BCA Prayer Notes, either in hard copy or online, to sign up for one or more of our Field Staff Newsletters, and to make use of the National Director's monthly Prayer Video. Prayer material is also available on all our social media channels. I personally feel remarkably sustained by the prayers of others. This is especially so with regard to safety on the road and long days of deputations, notably in the country. It is so encouraging, for instance when



With Rob & Michelle Edwards • February 2026



Bottom Image: Strathfieldsaye Community Church.
Circle Image: 'The Edwards'
Middle Image: April Christmas Eve Service
Bottom Image: Youth group activity
Leftmost

Greeting supporters, welcome to another edition of Strathfieldsaye Stories. Our apologies for the delay in writing, but we have lots going on and exciting news to update you with in terms of growth of our church and outreach into the community.

A huge mission field

When we first began ministry in Strathfieldsaye in 2020, there was just one service at 9:30 am which was traditional and the average age of the congregation was 73. We wanted to do something that was more family focused for our growing community.

With 6850 residents and 45 percent who claimed no church affiliation or religion in the 2021 Census, our town of Strathfieldsaye is a huge mission field. Not only did the Census show a distinct lack of church affiliation, it also showed that the average age in Strathfieldsaye was 36 years, with 31 percent of people aged 19 and below.

We were lucky to have six kids at our 9:30 am service and three of those kids were our boys! So, we thought, 'what can we do to try and bridge that gap?'

So, we planted a seed, to start an afternoon service.

In November 2022, we invited people to come along to share our vision. We were expecting

25 people, but 48 people came, which was pretty amazing.

4 pm church started off as fortnightly with the aim being to make church as engaging as possible for both adults and kids. Sometimes that involves using videos, visuals or even a version of messy church.

At first, we had regular services on the first and third Sundays, but in Term 4 of 2024, we changed things up a bit by also meeting on the second and fourth Sundays. Another couple led the adults in watching a video and then a discussion time and Rob would take the teens out and lead a Bible study which was great for those who were preparing for baptism.

When there is a fifth Sunday, a combined service is held at 11 am followed by lunch. It's important to try and bring the congregations together. Otherwise, these groups of faithful people wouldn't worship together.

The afternoon service is made up of Christians who are new to the area and have found a place that supports them and that it will only keep growing.

Top: BCA table at the AGM
Bottom: The Edwards' Newsletter,
Strathfieldsaye Stories

Prayer continued...

people ask me how a visit has gone, as it indicates that they have been using the Prayer Notes. This prayer support was also much appreciated when I underwent unexpected heart surgery in October and had to defer a number of parish visits. Thankfully I am back to work as normal.

I would also like to thank publicly The Revd Ernest Horth and attendees of the BCA Prayer Meeting he facilitates at 2 pm on the second Tuesday of each month at St Paul's, Boronia.

For your encouragement, our Regional Committee has also been praying for one of the Anglican Dioceses in Victoria in rotation at each of our meetings. This has been an excellent way for all of us to learn and pray for what God is doing across the state.

Regional Victorian Prayer Notes: I was also able to produce a number of editions of *Faith, Hope and Love: Pray for Regional Victoria*, where I suggest prayer points for each of Victoria's regional municipalities. Individual pages of this are sent out with receipts, and the full Notes are available at deputations and at events, including this evening. They are also available online at **bushchurchaid.com.au/vic**. It has been most encouraging to receive feedback on the Notes and to learn of people using them.



Top: BCA Prayer Notes; Bottom: Victorian Regional Prayer Notes

Media

A big thank you to Mrs Janine van den Tillaart and Mr Craig Buchanan who do such a creative and comprehensive job as our National Communications team. The Victorian Office has facilitated a number of articles for *The Real Australian*, and it has been helpful to have such good Victorian representation.

The BCA Victoria 2024 Annual Report that Janine helped produce last year was received extremely well, and we quickly ran out of the 600 copies printed. The Melbourne Anglican produced a number of articles, both online and in a hard copy edition, featuring Topher Hallyburton's work, in association with our Spring Gatherings. There has also been good media coverage in The Gippsland Anglican on Jude Benton's ministry in Mallacoota, and in the Diocese of Bendigo's Spirit, on various BCA ministries there.

Support

Finances

\$548,827 was received as income in 2025, together with bequests totalling \$58,650. Our income was significantly above our budget of \$473,800 and was our largest ever, apart from one year when we had a significant one-off donation.

This was an extraordinary result, for which we can only praise God. It is noteworthy too, as box, cheque and cash donations decline.

A big thank you to all our donors, large and small, as I am very conscious that any donation represents a commitment to gospel ministry in the country. I would also like to acknowledge here the Victorian bequests we received from the Harding Beneficiary Fund and the estates of the late Nan Esme Cook, Valarie Pickersgill, Claire Shaw and Patricia de Lacy.

Can I encourage readers to consider joining our Distance Giving Program if they do not already do so.

Distance Givers make a monthly donation to the work, either via credit card or direct bank deposit. Details can be found on the back of *The Real Australian*, online at **bushchurchaid.com.au** via the Get Involved and Give tabs, or in the brochure at our registration desk.





The Victorian Regional Committee

Support continued...

Office

It has been a delight to work with The Revd Matt Smith, who continues to serve half-time as the Victorian Administrative Assistant. Matt works half-time, on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays.

My thanks also go to our landlords, the parish of Banyule and their Vicar, The Revd Denise Nichols, who continue to support and pray for us.

Regional Committee

We have been extremely well served in 2025 by our Regional Committee, comprising of Mr Anthony Andreadza, The Revd Julie Blinco-Smith, The Revd Philip Knight, Mrs Jane Lamont, The Revd Stephen May, Mr James McClure, Mr Peter Michalke, The Revd

Joy Sandefur and The Revd Wayne Schuller. The Revd Stephen May has been our Chair. He has extensive experience in parish ministry, both in the Diocese of Bendigo and Melbourne. Stephen has extraordinary wisdom and patience and I am so grateful for his constant support.

In 2025 Stephen also served on the National Executive, together with The Revd Wayne Schuller. Mrs Jane Lamont and Mr Peter Michalke also served on the National Council.

The Regional Committee met every two months to update themselves on the work of the Society, pray for the Society and the Dioceses in Victoria, and give encouragement and counsel. They also served in various voluntary capacities, such as at events and with interviews. Thank you.

New constitutional arrangements for 2026

At the end of 2025, after extensive work by the National Council, the Society adopted a new Constitution and Basis of Faith.

The previous National Council and Executive arrangements have been replaced by a Board, elected by members. Under the new Constitution we will still have a Regional Committee, but there is not the need for an election. Similarly, there is not the need for a state-based Annual Meeting.

The Revds Stephen May and Wayne Schuller will continue to serve on the new Board. Stephen also serves on the Ministry Priority Panel and Wayne serves on the Members Sub-Committee.

National Office

Many serve the Society in our various State and National Offices, and it is a delight and privilege to work with them all. I would, however, like to particularly acknowledge the efforts of our National Director, The Revd Greg Harris, and our Chief Operating Officer, Mr Greg Bridge, both of whom are constantly juggling a broad array of responsibilities across a range of time zones.



*Top: The new BCA Board
Middle: Matt & Adrian
Bottom: The National Office Team*



BCA Locations as of December 2025

Looking ahead

I am delighted to advise that The Revd Pat O'Keeffe has accepted our invitation to be our featured speaker for our 2026 Spring Gathering program. With BCA support, Pat serves as the Rector of Katherine in the Northern Territory, where, within six months of their arrival, he and his wife Issy have already undergone quite a baptism, having experienced two floods to date. I do hope you can join us to learn of their work and pray for the parish. The program follows on the next page.

I am also delighted to advise that The Rt Revd Dr Mark Short Bishop of Canberra-Goulburn has accepted our invitation to be our featured speaker at our 2027 BCA Victoria Annual Dinner on Saturday 1 May, also at Glen Waverley Anglican Church. Mark previously served as the National Director of BCA and was recently elected as Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia, so his knowledge of the National Church, and especially of that in rural Australia is extensive. I do hope you can join us.

2026 Spring Gatherings

Tuesday 3 Nov 2026	Noon–2pm Holy Trinity Bendigo (Lunch) 6pm Bendigo Young Adults (Dinner)
Wednesday 4 Nov 2026	Noon–2pm St Mary's Sunbury (Lunch) 7.30pm–9pm St James Ivanhoe (Supper)
Friday 6 Nov 2026	6pm–8pm Warragul Anglican (Dinner)
Sunday 8 Nov 2026	8.30 & 10am Berwick Anglican (Preaching)
Monday 9 Nov 2026	Noon–2pm Glen Waverley Anglican (Lunch)

Your prayers for our forthcoming National Annual Meetings from 20–22 May, the Field Staff Conference on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland from 6–10 July and my full calendar of deputations would also be much appreciated.

With great thanks again to God,

The Revd Adrian Lane

8 April 2026



The Bush Church Aid Society of Australia
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