Some of you will have known Mr Gordon Young much longer than I did – by the time we met his once-keen mind had slowed although his spirit remained fresh. Gordon was a lecturer at Wagga Teachers’ College, where he had the privilege of training the next generation of educators. Apart from teaching his great passion was reaching Australia, and in particular its rural centres, for Christ. More specifically, his vision was to see a vibrant gospel witness in every Australian town with more than 200 residents – and he had a list of every town in that category.

Not long after commencing my role with BCA I was leafing through a file when I came across a letter from Gordon to my predecessor The Reverend Ernie Carnaby. “Dear Mr Carnaby” it begins “I would be grateful if you would consider some needy towns, and see what can be done, to evoke from the appropriate bishops invitations to send BUSH CHURCH AID CLERGY there” and ends “Having worked to bring the total down to 25, I fervently hope for your help to remove a further three towns from that list…”

You will gather from that extract that Gordon had something of the spirit of the persistent widow about him. Generations of graduates, Christian workers and denominational leaders were inspired and occasionally prodded into making that vision a reality.

Gordon’s story exemplifies the powerful combination of a compelling vision and intentional relationships under the sovereignty of God. We can never replicate another person’s life or ministry but we can learn from it and apply it in the circumstances God has given us.

At BCA our vision is simple and straightforward, at least in its articulation – “Australia for Christ.” More specifically, we long for the day when everyone in the Australian bush will have access to a Christ-centred, Bible-based and mission-shaped gathering of God’s people. To this end we work in partnership with Diocesan Bishops to select, send and support people who share this vision and will express and embody it in their ministries. We do this in fellowship with thousands of members who pray, give and encourage.

During the past twelve months I have been reflecting on the particular disciplines or practices that will help us bridge the gap between aspiration and reality. Let me explore four, how we have moved forward with them during 2012, as well as outlining possibilities for the future.

Understanding Context

No ministry or church exists in a vacuum. Faithful stewardship requires that we understand the time and place where God has called us to serve Him and make Him known. What can we say about the people who live there – their hopes and fears, their besetting idols, their understanding or misunderstanding of the gospel?

Mr Tim Keller calls this gospel contextualisation – “It is giving people the Bible’s answers, which they may not at all want to hear, to questions about life that people in their particular time and place are asking in language and forms they can comprehend, and through appeals and arguments with force they can feel, even if they reject them.”

1 Letter dated 20.6.1991
2 Center (sic!) Church (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2012), p89
Like people, each community is unique. Having said that, there are at least five different types of communities where BCA has a ministry presence.

- **Traditional farming communities**
  These communities tend to be more stable and older than Australia as a whole. There is a higher than average identification with traditional denominations although this is not always expressed by active church involvement or personal faith in Christ. Using the typology developed in Mission-Shaped Church they have large numbers of residents who could be described as open de-churched. BCA examples include Hay and Hillston.

- **Mining/resource communities**
  These communities tend to be young, culturally diverse and highly mobile. There is a low level of identification with the Christian faith and this is reflected in low levels of church involvement. Residents of these communities tend to be unchurched. There are many BCA examples including Newman, Roxby Downs and Moranbah.

- **Lifestyle/tourism communities**
  These communities, which are often but not always found on the coast, have significant numbers of people who have re-located to pursue artistic and other lifestyle interests. They have a higher than average age profile but in contrast to traditional farming communities a much lower level of religious identification – many residents could be described as closed de-churched. Kangaroo Island and to some extent King Island are BCA examples.

- **Regional centres and associated communities**
  These communities are a hub for government and non-government services for their surrounding districts. They draw in residents from smaller farming communities both for retirement and for educational reasons and also from urban centres and develop their own associated communities. As such they are really a patchwork drawn from different populations and cannot easily be characterised using one category. Strathfieldsaye and to some extent Sunraysia South are BCA examples of communities associated with a nearby regional centre.

- **Indigenous communities**
  These communities may be part of a larger community (as with the Nadens’ ministry at Broken Hill) or have their own discrete identity (as with the remote Arnhem Land communities visited by Bruce Chapman). They tend to be young and while Census figures would indicate a higher than average level of identification with Christian denominations I suspect that they do not fit easily into the Mission-Shaped Church typology.

We will be working with the team from the National Church Life Survey to better understand these community types and their impact on church life and mission. We will also be working to develop task groups to consider the challenges and opportunities for mission in these different environments. I am hoping this process will develop resources and insights that are of value not just to BCA but to the wider Australian church.

- **Engaging Transitions**
  Times of transition are moments of threat and opportunity for believers in Christ. Moving from one home to another, from education to work or from paid work to retirement can result in a loss of contact with other Christians and the adoption of values and priorities which are hostile to the gospel. But every move is also an opportunity to re-evaluate budgets and diaries in light of the gospel and to commit or re-commit to mission and ministry.

BCA is already engaged with young people making the transition from school to further study and from tertiary study to the next stage of life. In 2012 Josh Goscombe spent a year at Wickham under Youthworks Year 13 programme and in 2013 two more Year 13 students are placed at Wickham, funded with scholarships provided by a BCA supporter. In Launceston the Imagine ministry overseen by the Goodacres has inspired two University graduates to spend a year as ministry interns.
At Holbrook James Coats has supervised a young member of the congregation as part of the Bishop’s Gap Year programme and in Roxby Downs Mary Lewis has been working towards employing a ministry apprentice. Over the next 12 months we will be working to draw these threads together so that in partnership with other organisations we can be even more intentional in identifying the next generation of leaders for ministry in the bush.

In the few next years, significant numbers of baby-boomer Christians will move into retirement. Our Nomads ministry is aimed particularly, although not exclusively, at this age group and in 2012 Doug Orr has worked to renew this work so that it appeals to people with a broader range of skills beyond building and maintenance. The Pastoral Committee is reviewing our Co-Worker (self-supporting) ministries. I am hoping this will be the prelude to a program challenging and equipping soon-to-be and recent retirees to relocate to rural areas for missional reasons.

 Building Networks

In last year’s report I highlighted the importance of networks in facilitating ministry. I noted that networks grow through connections around a shared interest, vision or opportunity.

I expect the context-specific task groups outlined earlier will be the nucleus of emerging networks. Peter Palmer continues to develop a network of people engaged in mining chaplaincy through personal mentoring, sharing information and by helping to arrange the ‘Out of the Pit’ conference for Christians in mining (held in Adelaide in 2012). Peter also raised the level of support from mining companies to the point where his FIFO Chaplaincy ministry should be financially self-supporting in 2013 and beyond.

It has also become clear that ministry to people from different cultures is a key priority in many BCA locations and we are looking at ways to build contacts between urban churches that have several years’ experience in this type of ministry and some of our Field Staff.

 Tending the Vision

The recent Australian book Driven by Purpose describes the phenomenon of ‘mission drift’ as it relates to charities:

“Few charities know who they are and why they are doing what they are doing. It is probable that, at one time, within each organisation someone did know...however, that clarity is no longer there for most organisations. It has been muddled by a focus on service delivery, it has been obscured by a focus on financial performance or, perhaps, financial survival, it has been pushed out by a desire and need to professionalise a purpose that once was well understood but poorly executed.”3

Mission organisations can fall prey to the same trajectory. They can drift into a respectable status quo where the gospel imperatives which once gave them purpose are at best assumed and at worst denied.

Looking back on his first ten years at the helm of BCA Bishop Sydney Kirkby recalls that from the outset it was driven by the conviction that “Australia needed a robust Gospel more than anything else.”4. Generations later that need remains as pressing as ever and BCA’s contribution to God’s mission ‘down under’ hinges on a large part on whether we continue to heed that call.

3 (Stephen Judd, Anne Robinson & Felicity Errington, Driven by Purpose: Charities that make the difference (Greenwich: Hammond Press, 2012), pp4-5

4 S.J. Kikby These Ten Years (BCA Sydney 1930) p6
In 2019, should the Lord tarry, we will celebrate 100 years of mission under the BCA umbrella. Later this year Dunham and Co will assist us in a process of clarifying our distinctive identity as a ministry and how we communicate it to current and potential supporters. However, at an even more fundamental level we need to constantly renew our commitment to a robust gospel, most particularly by selecting and sending men and women who have that gospel at the core of their DNA.

The year just passed was my first full 12 months as National Director. In many ways it was a challenging time as the gyrations of mineral prices and the lingering effects of drought and other natural disasters continued to impact on many of our locations.

A key priority for me was to visit as many of our Field Staff on site and whenever I did I was inspired and humbled by their faithfulness and creativity in making Christ known. We were able to fill long-term vacancies at Coober Pedy and Kangaroo Island and also move into new field locations. At years’ end we still had vacancies at Blackwater and Paraburdoo/Tom Price which were a cause for prayer. It is clear that more needs to be done to raise the profile of serving with BCA especially amongst younger clergy and we are looking to develop resources and relationships which will do that.

Our National Office team continued to work diligently and effectively to steward our resources. Mrs Robyn Williams and her finance team ensured that administrative matters were handled wisely and expeditiously and Mrs Alison Pearce continued to grow our coverage in the Christian media as well as our social media presence. Alison will shortly be leaving us for a period of maternity leave.

A special tribute must go to Mrs Jenny Baxter who retired at the end of 2012 after over a decade of service as PA to the National Director. Jenny did a wonderful job orienting me to the workings of BCA and ensuring that any slip-ups were much less frequent that they would otherwise have been. I know Jenny is enjoying the opportunity to travel with Chris in his deputation responsibilities.

Our Regional Officers met regularly throughout the year to share insights and plan strategies. Our major corporate project was the Field Staff Conference held in Adelaide in September. Mrs Vivien Bleby and her South Australia team and Jenny carried the lion’s share of the organisation but it was a team effort and you can see from the Field Staff reports how much it was appreciated. Our RO team farewelled The Reverend Greg Jones and we wish him and Rhi every blessing for a fruitful and, we trust, musical retirement.

Our Councillors and especially BCA Chairman Mr Fred Chilton have been supportive and challenging in good measure. During 2013 I hope to spend some ‘one on one’ time with each Councillor and hear their dreams and passions for God’s mission through BCA.

My wife Monica and children, Andrew and Matthew, have been kind and understanding companions on the journey, not least when BCA commitments take me away from home. Monica has enjoyed working with a small team to produce and distribute our *Still Waters* family magazine which has been a blessing to many.

At BCA we are heirs of the visions of people like Mr Gordon Young and Bishop Sydney Kirkby. However they would be the last to suggest that we should simply seek to replicate who they were or what they did. Our call is to shape a vision that will inspire those around us and after us, in Christ’s Name and for Christ’s glory.

The Reverend Dr Mark Short
National Director - The Bush Church Society of Australia
AUTUMN 2012

- The Reverend Geoff and Mrs Sarah Chambers commence ministry as BCA Affiliates in the Parish of South Tamworth

- The Reverend Greg Jones concludes his nine years as Regional Officer in Victoria. Greg and Rhi had previously served as BCA Field Staff in the Murchison, Western Australia.

- BCA joins as a partner in the Bible Society’s ‘Live Light in 25 words’ campaign. Over 10,000 individuals and 2,000 churches make use of campaign resources

- Shellharbour Anglican College travels to Gilgandra to continue the link established during the Lanham’s time there

- Having moved from Gilgandra Mr Rich and Mrs Julie Lanham commence service in Sale Victoria, where Rich is on the staff as the Cathedral and Diocesan Youth Officer

WINTER 2012

- BCA supports the ‘Soul in the Bush’ initiative which sees several teams of young people travel to locations in rural NSW for outreach and service

- Bishop Peter Brain concludes his ministry as Bishop of Armidale and his term as BCA President. Bishop Stuart Robinson of the Canberra and Goulburn diocese elected as new President.

- The Reverend Keith and Mrs Cynthia Groundwater commence ministry as BCA Affiliates

- Penrith Anglican College returned to Wickham to the Goscombes
Bishop John Stead commences as Bishop of Willochra

The Reverend Geoff and Mrs Tracey Piggott are appointed as Field Staff in Coober Pedy.

Bishop Gary Nelson commences as Bishop of North-West Australia

Margaret Kidney, an amazing woman and an outstanding worker for BCA over 30 years with terms as President of the SA Ladies’ Auxiliary, as a Regional Committee member and Councillor died on 3 October 2012.

SUMMER 2012

The Reverend Mike and Mrs Chantalle Keith conclude their service as Field Staff in Lightning Ridge and take up an appointment in New Zealand. Shortly before their departure the Parish of Lightning Ridge had celebrated its centenary.

The Reverend Helen Chick concludes her term of service at the Central Mallee Co-operative Parish. Helen continues to recover from Ross River fever

Mrs Jenny Baxter retires as PA to the National Director

The Anglican Parish of Sunraysia South hosts ‘Bible in the Bush’, including a visit from King’s College Warrnambool

Brindabella Christian College went to Strathfieldsaye, Inaburra School to Broken Hill and Broughton Anglican College to Lockhart in the Riverina Diocese