

THE ADDRESS OF THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR TO THE BUSH CHURCH AID SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MAY 2015



“The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made.” Psalm 145:13b

At a recent national Anglican conference I was invited to give a ten minute presentation on “The Future of Rural Ministry” with the expectation I would cover such topics as the continuing drift of young people to the coast, the decline of smaller towns and the growth of regional “sponge” cities. I somewhat cheekily asked if I could change the title to “Rural Ministry and the Future of Mission”. The reason for the change is my conviction that the Australian bush gives us unique insights into the challenges and opportunities facing God’s people across all Western culture. When we confront the mobility and diversity of our mining communities, the need for faithful innovation in our farming communities or the entrenched scepticism of our lifestyle communities we see the future for all of us – and the need to fully commit to God’s mission to the world He loves. So be assured, BCA is not engaged in some missional backwater populated by people of exotic and marginal tastes. More than ever, I believe we have a calling that is central to God’s purposes for our Nation.

❖ *The Context for Bush Ministry*

Notwithstanding the perception of some city dwellers that life is ‘slower’ in the bush change was the one constant during 2014.

At the national level declining prices for coal, iron ore and other minerals saw a number of mines, near communities where BCA has a presence, either winding back or delaying proposed expansions. Persistent drought in North-West New South Wales and Western Queensland placed many farming communities under severe pressure.

The public hearings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlighted the past failures of a number of churches, Christian and other organisations and the importance of ensuring ministries are conducted with the best interests of the most vulnerable members of our community in mind.

At the denominational level the Anglican General Synod met in Adelaide and amongst other matters considered the report of the Viability and Structures Task Force. The document made for sobering reading. It noted that where growth in church attendance is evident it can be attributed to a limited number of Parishes or Ministries. The distribution, number and age of ordained leadership reveals a church unprepared to meet the challenges of mission and ministry in the 21st century; the viability of the traditional Parish system is under significant pressure and the financial position of a number of Dioceses is a matter of significant concern. Dioceses have a lack of capacity and expertise in areas such as governance, financial reporting and occupational health and safety and it is likely that the gap between expectations and the resources available to meet them will only widen in the years to come.

During the same period the Society has engaged with each of these challenges. We continued to support Field Staff in a number of mining towns and the Fly-In-Fly-Out mining chaplaincy of The Reverend Peter and Mrs Joy Palmer. Where necessary, the Society was able to work creatively with churches to place ministry on a sustainable long-term footing where there was a sudden downturn in local support.

The theme of ministering in drought affected communities was the focus of our first appeal in 2014 and there was a most generous response from supporters. This allowed us to fund a partnership with Anglicare Northern Inland to engage Mr Ran and Mrs Jenny Mitchell as Drought Family Support Workers, drawing on their experience as farmers and counsellors to complement the pastoral ministries of BCA Field Staff such as The Reverend David and Mrs Joanne Piper and The Reverend Anne and Mr Noel Nixon.

Preparing material for the Royal Commission gave the Society the opportunity to review our history and policies in the areas of Safe Ministry and Professional Standards. All BCA Field Staff are bound by Faithfulness in Service, the national Anglican code for *Personal Behaviour and the practice of Pastoral Ministry by Clergy and Church Workers*. We did identify a need to clarify procedures to be followed should we receive a complaint of abuse relating to one of the hostel facilities previously operated by the Society and are currently working with experts in the field to formulate such a policy.

Along with Dioceses and a number of other organisations the Society was invited to prepare a response to the Viability and Structures Task Force. In our submission to the Standing Committee of General Synod we emphasised the importance of a robust confidence in the Gospel, a commitment to the priority of mission and the need to identify and nurture leaders who will respond to the challenges facing the Church in a collaborative and creative fashion. The submission has already proved to be a valuable conversation starter in conversations with Diocesan Bishops and other interested parties.

❖ *Emerging Priorities in Bush Ministry*

The Society has identified a compelling need to equip a new generation of leaders, both Lay and Ordained, for service in the bush. To this end the Society was represented at the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students' National Training Event in December. This was attended by over 1000 university students and through the 'Going Bush' initiative, overseen by Ms Jen Schabel, we have ongoing contact with a number who are considering living and serving in the bush post-graduation.

We also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry Training Strategy that will allow us to solicit tax deductible donations to establish pre-college Ministry Apprenticeships in BCA locations. A number of BCA Field Staff are in the process of being trained to offer skilled supervision of these apprentices, the first of whom we hope to be appointed in 2016.

The Society's Personnel Committee conducted a review of our Ministry Training Arrangement classification, under which recent graduates of Theological Colleges can serve a 2-3 year training placement under an experienced Minister. In an era when many rural Dioceses are no longer able to fund 'curacies' from their own resources it is likely that this area of the Society's work will need to grow if there is to be a constant supply of Ministers with the commitments, skills and experience to serve in the bush long term.

Within this overall focus on leadership the Society has a particular commitment to developing pathways for Indigenous Christians. It was therefore a great delight when at the end of the year we were able to enter into an arrangement to support Nathaniel Naden, the son of BCA Field Staff, The Reverend Neville and Mrs Kathryn Naden, as he commences theological study in Sydney.

❖ *Partnering in Bush Ministry*

Partnership in mission and ministry is central to the Society's ethos. We are committed to developing relationships of mutual dependence with Dioceses and other Christian organisations. A particular expression of this has been the partnership between the Society and Generate ministries to establish the Bush Scripture Initiative with the goal of having a paid SRE (Scripture) teacher for each state High school in rural NSW by the end of the decade.

In 2014 Mrs Cheryl Hallinan was appointed as the first Bush Scripture Adviser under this arrangement and has already overseen the establishment of new SRE Boards and positions in several communities in Southern New South Wales.

The partnerships within BCA were strengthened through our Biennial Field Staff Conference which was held at Vision Valley Conference Centre in September. The Conference had a strong training component, focussing on the areas of mission and evangelism, pastoral care and equipping others. A particular highlight was the presence of many former Field Staff who joined us for a special lunch.

I do want to acknowledge the great work done this year by our Administration Manager Mrs Robyn Williams and the rest of our National Office team. During the year they engaged in a great deal of 'behind the scenes' but vital work as we reviewed our communication strategy and infrastructure. All of us have been introduced to new concepts and there has been much need for patience and perseverance as we negotiated and then overcame various technical challenges. Well done team – we are getting there and I am confident that under God your hard work will reap benefits for years to come.

At the end of the year we farewelled two special members of the BCA team – Mrs Vivien Bleby and The Reverend Ian McGrath as they concluded their terms as Regional Officers for South Australia / Northern Territory and Queensland / Northern New South Wales respectively. Each of them grew the footprint of BCA in their regions and we look forward to continuing engagement with them. By God's grace we were able to identify suitable replacements in The Reverends Steve Davis and David Rogers-Smith so there was minimal gap between the appointments.

The most profound expressions of partnership are of course the God-inspired prayers, gifts and words of encouragement from thousands of BCA supporters. Once again we were able to meet budget and to grow our reserves closer towards the goal of being able to fund our Administrative Expenses from Investment Income so that every dollar donated will be used for ministry. It has been a delight to work alongside our

Council, as stewards of these resources, and to benefit from their wisdom through my 360 Degree Review Process. I continue to be deeply thankful to God for the love and support of my family, not least when work commitments mean we must be apart for a time.

As always the future is unknown to us, but known to God who walks with us as it unfolds. May we go the distance together, confident that He is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine as seek to reach Australia for Christ.



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

The 2014 Year in Review

SUMMER 2014

- ❖ We welcomed The Reverend David and Mrs Priya Morgan as BCA Field Staff at Paraburdoo / Tom Price after a four year gap since the previous appointment at these locations.
- ❖ The Reverend Frank and Mrs Jo Nicol, together with children Lydia and Eli, were commissioned for service at Exmouth Western Australia. Frank had been the Assistant Minister at Port Hedland for some years and previously worked as a school teacher in Karratha and Kununurra.
- ❖ The Reverend Peter Adkins commenced as Regional Officer for NSW / ACT.
- ❖ The Right Reverend Greg Thompson, former BCA Regional Officer and Bishop of the Northern Territory, was installed as Bishop of Newcastle.
- ❖ The Reverend Sarah Macneil was consecrated as Bishop of Grafton.

AUTUMN 2014

- ❖ The Reverend Arthur and Mrs Jane Tanner retired from Flinders Island at the end of March and returned to their home in Hawker, South Australia. They previously served with BCA at Leigh Creek.
- ❖ Mr Timothy Adkins was farewelled at the end of May after 12 months as Media and Communications Officer, while Mrs Alison Pearce was on maternity leave.
- ❖ The Reverend Cameron Venables was consecrated as Bishop for the Western Region in the Diocese of Brisbane
- ❖ The Right Reverend John Harrower, Bishop of Tasmania, was appointed President of BCA at the Annual Council in May.
- ❖ The Reverend Canon John Butler resigned from BCA Council having been a member since 1978 and Vice President since 2009. He also served as interim National Director between The Reverend Canon Brian Roberts and The Reverend Dr Mark Short.

WINTER 2014

- ❖ The Reverend Ernest Horth resigned from Council and the Victorian Regional Committee. Ernest also served as Victorian State Secretary in 1979-1981 and later as BCA Deputationist to Queensland and Armidale and Grafton Dioceses.
- ❖ Mr Ran and Jenny Mitchell commenced with BCA, in partnership with Anglicare Northern Inland, as Drought Family Support Workers.
- ❖ The Reverend Keith and Mrs Cynthia Groundwater concluded their term as Affiliates in the Parishes of Adelong and Tarcutta.
- ❖ Ms Melinda Law joined the National Office team as Digital and Social Media Communications Officer to work alongside Mrs Alison Pearce, who returned from maternity leave.
- ❖ The Reverend Rob Gillion was consecrated as Bishop of Riverina.
- ❖ Over 100 members of the BCA family gathered near Sydney for our Biennial Field Staff Conference.

SPRING 2014

- ❖ The April Bottom Scholarship was awarded to Miss Maddie Hoysted from Broken Hill.
- ❖ The Reverend Gary and Mrs Nikki Alexander rejoiced on the birth of their second son, Tobias, on August 12.
- ❖ The Reverend David and Mrs Traci Mitchell, who had been serving in a Ministry Training Arrangement in Karratha with Archdeacon Les and Mrs Jenny Gaulton, moved with their daughter Daphne to Geraldton to start a pioneering evangelistic ministry. Their second child, Edward, was born November 29.
- ❖ Mrs Vivien Bleby and The Reverend Ian McGrath concluded their terms as Regional Officers for SA / NT and Qld / NNSW. Both had previously served with BCA in the field.
- ❖ The Reverend Greg Anderson was consecrated as Bishop of The Northern Territory.
- ❖ The Reverend Geoff and Mrs Sarah Chambers concluded their term as Affiliates in Tamworth at the end of December.

Vale

- ❖ The Revd Ron Beard, who served with BCA in Exmouth 1970 to 1973, died December 3, 2013.
- ❖ The Revd Mapson Williams, who served with BCA in Wilcannia 1983 – 1986, died December 8, 2013.
- ❖ Mr Jim Gosbee, National Accountant and Office Manager for BCA, September 1986 to May 1999, died December 11, 2013.
- ❖ Sister Vaisy Cochrane, Sister-in-charge, Tarcoola Hospital, served also at Ceduna / Penong, Cook and at Coober Pedy from 1961 to 1966. She died December 24, 2013.
- ❖ Mrs Sue Doncaster, the wife of The Revd Ted Doncaster, died in Perth on February 5. Ted and Sue served with BCA in Carnarvon and Sothern Cross.
- ❖ We gave thanks for the life of The Revd Dalba Primmer, who died on April 30, after a six month battle with cancer. He served with BCA at Newman from 1976 to 1978.
- ❖ The Right Reverend John McIntyre, Bishop of Gippsland, died suddenly, June 6.
- ❖ The Revd Barry Huggett died June 23. He and his wife Peg served BCA in Port Hedland, 1964 to 1966. Following this Barry served as NSW State Secretary 1966 – 1972.
- ❖ “Mac” (George Macarthur) Job lost his battle with cancer on August 6. Mac served with BCA’s Flying Medical Service at Ceduna and in 2003 was awarded the OAM for his services to the promotion of aviation safety.
- ❖ Sister June English died on August 27 aged 82. Matron English was Nurse Co-ordinator at Cook and Tarcoola, along the Trans Line in South Australia in 1984 and between 1986 and 1989.
- ❖ Mrs Laurel Muston, wife of Bishop Gerald Muston died on September 2. Gerald (or Ged as he was known) was BCA Federal Secretary from 1969 to 1971.