



THE ADDRESS OF THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR TO THE BUSH CHURCH AID SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MAY 2016

Since 1919 BCA’s heart has been for people living in rural, remote and regional Australia, a heart we believe reflects the priority of Jesus who came into the ‘far country’ that is our world to seek and save the lost. We’ve been committed to going the distance to reach Australia for Christ, sending and supporting men and women to help our nation connect with the grace of God revealed in Jesus.

UNDERSTANDING OUR MISSION FIELD

Our Mission Field is Growing

So where or what is the bush? As Don Watson notes in his recent book the bush is a state of mind as well as a place¹. Insofar as the bush can be measured, BCA has identified it with those locations classed as outer regional, remote and very remote in the Australian Bureau of Statistics remoteness classification. Together these areas are home to some 2.5 million people, or around 11.5 per cent of the Australian population.

It is often assumed that the population of the bush is in numerical decline while numbers in our big cities are growing. This is at best a half truth. It is true that Australia is becoming more urbanised – the *percentage* of our population that lives in major cities is growing. But the actual *numbers* of people is increasing across the board, and is forecast to do so into the future.

Australia’s Population by Remoteness Class (‘000)			
	2004	2014	2027 (projected)
Major Cities	13,818	15,182	21,021
Inner Regional	3740	4000	4825
Outer Regional	1892	1966	2439
Remote	298	324	419
Very Remote	183	208	274
“The Bush”	2373	2498	3132

Source: Progress in Australian Regions Yearbook 2015, pp172-180

Here’s the bottom line: According to these projections there will be an extra 800,000 people living in the bush in 2027 compared to less than a quarter of a century earlier. We need to be intentional in seeking to reach each one of them with the good news of Jesus.

Our Mission Field is changing

It is often assumed that the pace of change is slower in the bush than in our big cities. In fact, there is evidence that the opposite is true. Statisticians have calculated a measure of change in the industry mix of employment between two points in time called the structural change index. The following table shows how that index varies by remoteness class.

¹ “The Australian bush is both real and imaginary. Real, in that it grows in various bush-like ways, and dies, rots, burns and grows into the bush again; real in harbouring life. Imaginary, in that among the life it harbours is the life of the Australian mind. It is, by many accounts, the source of the nation’s idea of itself.” Don Watson The Bush: Travels in the Heart of Australia (Melbourne: Hamish Hamilton, 2014), p66.

Structural Change Index by Remoteness Class (2006-2011)	
Major Cities	3.6
Inner Regional	4.1
Outer Regional	4.3
Remote	6.2
Very Remote	15.5
AUSTRALIA	3.8

Source: *Progress in Australian Regions Yearbook 2015*, pp172-180

Here's the bottom line: In the period in question, the further you lived from a big city the faster the pace of economic change you experienced.

No doubt related to this, there are signs that people living in the bush are under increasing pressure.

Our Mission Field is challenged

There are several areas in which people living in the bush have been and continue to be disadvantaged compared to those living in major cities. Australians in the bush:

- are more likely to be overweight
- are more likely to be smokers
- are less likely to meet physical activity guidelines
- are more likely to be homeless
- have greater difficulty accessing medical, dental and mental health services

But there is an emerging aspect of disadvantage which is significant because it risks undermining one of the areas in which the bush has traditionally done well. The concept of **social capital**² refers to those networks, formal and informal relationships and shared norms which build trust, bind a community together and give it resilience in the face of external and internal challenges.

It has generally been understood that social capital is higher in rural areas than in big cities – the bush is a place where people know one another more intimately and are connected in multiple ways. However, there are signs this situation may be changing. The table on the next page shows two key indicators of social capital – the percentage of people who are involved in a civic or political group and the percentage of people who agree or strongly agree that most people can be trusted.

² Key works on social capital include Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster, 2000) and David Halpern *Social Capital* (Polity Press, 2005). Andrew Leigh's *Disconnected* (UNSW Press 2010) applies this work to the Australian context.

Indicators of Social Capital by Remoteness Class (%)				
<i>Group Involvement</i>	2006	2010	2014	2006-2014 Change
Major Cities	18.1	18.0	13.6	-4.5
Inner Regional	19.9	19.8	13.8	-6.1
Outer Regional and Remote	18.8	21.6	12.4	-6.4
<i>Generalised Trust</i>				
Major Cities	53.2	54.0	55.6	2.4
Inner Regional	56.3	55.7	52.3	-4.0
Outer Regional and Remote	55.4	51.9	50.8	-4.6

Source: Progress in Australian Regions Yearbook 2015, pp158-162

On both dimensions social capital is eroding fastest in communities which are furthest from our big cities. This has significant implications for the quality of life in such places. It also represents a major challenge and opportunity for Christian ministry in the bush. What better time to be building healthy communities of faith where people from diverse backgrounds connect under the Lordship of Christ!

During 2015 The Bush Church Aid Society sought to respond to these challenges and opportunities in two main ways:

MEETING OUR MISSION: CLARIFYING OUR PRIORITIES

At its 2015 Annual Meeting the Council began work on clarifying the key priority areas we believe God is calling us to engage with at this time. As a next step we asked our Field Staff to let us know what is currently happening in their location in each of these areas. The results are outlined below:

Bringing the gospel of Christ to the outermost parts of Australia

First and foremost BCA is committed to sending messengers so that all Australians, no matter where they live and work, are able to hear the life-changing message of Christ. The proclamation of the gospel in words and the demonstration of the gospel in changed lives must remain central to all that we do.

Almost all (94 per cent) of Field Staff were able to identify specific ways in which they and the people with who they minister were pursuing this goal. This included congregational worship, community outreach events at Christmas and Easter, conversations with tourists, evangelistic courses and dialogue meetings, engagement initiatives such as Mainly Music and the establishment of missional communities which bless and serve a particular group of people.

Developing a new generation of culturally diverse Christian leaders

BCA is committed to engaging young people, discipling them in the faith and encouraging them in ministry so they can lead others to Christ. We recognise that as Australia as a whole and the bush in particular becomes more culturally diverse this needs to be reflected in the people we send and support.

Just over half (53 per cent) of our Field Staff were able to identify specific activities in these areas. These included children's and youth programs, leadership training camps, internship opportunities, hosting visits by groups from training colleges and supporting individuals who are undertaking formal theological study.

Supporting ministry by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

BCA is committed to working with our first peoples so they can serve Christ in ways that are Biblically faithful and culturally appropriate. Just under half of Field Staff (47 per cent) were involved in some way in this area. This included leading congregations with many ATSI members, visiting remote settlements, training Aboriginal leaders and raising funds for work in Aboriginal communities.

Planting and renewing sustainable churches

BCA is committed to establishing vibrant and outward-looking gatherings of Christ's people. We also hope to see existing congregations renewed in their relationship with Christ and their practice of ministry so they can more effectively reach their surrounding community.

Forty-four per cent of Field Staff could identify ways in which they and their ministries were contributing to this. This was through pastoring new stand-alone congregations, starting new all-age-friendly congregations alongside existing ministries, developing innovative community connection ventures and helping existing congregations review the way they do church in order to become more accessible to the unreached.

Equipping local leaders for fruitful ministry

BCA is committed to supporting Christians who are already 'on the ground' so they can be salt and light for Christ. Fruitful ministry will happen both in gatherings of God's people and as Christians live for Jesus in their daily lives.

Just under three quarters (74 per cent) of Field Staff mentioned ways in which this was happening in their location. Locals are being equipped through faithful Bible teaching, training for specific outreach and ministry initiatives, supporting and mentoring Bible study and other ongoing ministry leaders, the development of 'in-house' discipleship programs and by drawing together local leaders to receive additional training through distance education and participation in regional training conferences.

Providing care in Christ's Name

BCA is committed to serving hurting people in times of crisis and through ongoing Christ-centred pastoral care. Almost all (97 per cent) of Field Staff mentioned initiatives in this area, including hospitality and pastoral visitation, the provision of emergency food and other relief, drought ministry, Op-shop ministries and providing volunteers for other ministries such as Mission to Seafarers.

Clearly there is much reason for celebration and thanksgiving in the information outlined above. God is at work through His servants! Yet faithful stewardship requires that we always seek to make a good thing better. During 2016 we hope to further engage with these key priority areas. The Council will work to identify best practice in each of these areas and explore the implications for staffing in the field and at home base. The key priority areas will form the basis for six learning communities to be established at the October 2016 Field Staff Conference to facilitate peer-to-peer learning. We are exploring ways in which BCA's accumulated experience across these areas can be creatively shared with the wider Australian Christian community. As a first step in this direction we are presently highlighting a different key priority area in each edition of *The Real Australian* magazine.

MEETING OUR MISSION: COMMUNICATING OUR MESSAGE

A major milestone in September 2015 was the launch of what I have called "a fresh look for an enduring mission". This involved a coordinated process of review and re-design across our print, online and social media platforms. The new look was launched at a series of gatherings with supporters in each region and through a webinar that brought together Field Staff from across Australia. While it is still early days the very encouraging response to our end-of-year appeal was a good first test of the new look and its ability to resonate with current and potential supporters.

Throughout 2016 we will seek to build on this momentum by implementing a more intentional process for welcoming new supporters and helping them engage with the different aspects of God's mission through BCA. Our communications team is putting in place a more strategic system for coordinating communication between Field Staff and their link churches and supporters and we will continue to make use of our new CRM software to target communication according to the interests and passions of particular supporters.

Of course communication is about far more than a logo, a tagline or colour scheme – as important as those tools are! At its deepest level, it is about one human sharing with another what God has placed on their heart. BCA is blessed with thousands of men and women who want to see Christ honoured in our nation and their testimony and witness will always be the greatest resource of all.

PARTNERS IN MISSION

One of BCA's core commitments is partnership. We seek to work in humility, servanthood and fellowship with the church in mission and by developing interdependent relationships with Diocesan Bishops and other Christian organisations. We work to build connections of prayer, support and mutual encouragement between Christians across thousands of kilometres. We can only do this because of the many faithful people who contribute their time, talents and treasures.

Amongst those people I do want to highlight the particular contribution of our National Office staff. Our Accounts Team (Ms Desiree Chan and Mrs Philippa McLoughlin) ensure that our books are in order and that staff on the field can minister unhindered by anxiety over whether their next payment will arrive on time. Our Communications Team (previously Mrs Alison Pearce and currently Mrs Janine van den Tillaart and Ms Melinda Law) ensure that the good news of what God is doing throughout Australia finds its way into the letterboxes, inboxes and social media feeds of thousands. Mr Philip Lidbetter has overseen the conversion of our database systems so we can enter into a new era of communication with confidence and creativity. My Personal Assistant, Mrs Rebecca Jeavons makes my workload much smoother and manageable than it would otherwise be.

Towards the end of the year our long-serving Administration Manager, Mrs Robyn Williams, advised that she would be concluding in that role in early 2016. Robyn exemplifies all that is best about the BCA culture – a concern for people and a heart to serve them so they can fulfil their calling to make Christ known. The BCA Council will have further opportunity to thank her during our Annual Meeting.

THE MISSION RE-VISITED

As I was preparing this report I was reading through the Book of Isaiah, and in particular chapters 40 to 48. In these chapters God's prophet addresses a people who are somewhat overwhelmed by the events around them and perhaps because of this tempted to believe the idols of the Nations are more powerful than the God of Israel. God reminds them that He alone is God and that one day every knee will bow before Him (Isaiah 45:23). It is a promise we see fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus, our Servant King (Philippians 2:5-11). What better promise could there be to sustain mission in modern Australia? Contemporary idols are many – seductive affluence, sexual licence and the perks of power and privilege. But the way of the true God is the way of the cross, and in following the One who bridged the distance between heaven and earth we find the strength to rise up and go the distance to reach Australia for Christ.



The Reverend Dr Mark Short

National Director – The Bush Church Aid Society of Australia

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Summer 2015

- Over 60 BCA Nomads attended the first ever Nomads' Gathering at Nundle, near Tamworth.
- The Rt Reverend Kay Goldsworthy is installed as Bishop of the Diocese of Gippsland.
- BCA is represented as over 450 delegates gather in Melbourne to consider the future of the Anglican Church and mission in Australia at the Anglican Futures' Conference.
- The Reverend Steve Davis commenced as Regional Officer for South Australia and Northern Territory. Steve and his wife Lyn have many years' experience living and ministering in rural South Australia.
- The Reverend David and Mrs Crystal Fell, together with their children Wendell, Marigold and Ernest, commence service with BCA on Norfolk Island.
- The Reverend Joel and Mrs Hannah Hill, together with their children Amy, Finnegan and John, commence service at Roxby Downs where Joel is engaged under a Ministry Training Arrangement.
- Mr Nathaniel Naden, son of The Reverend Neville and Mrs Kathryn Naden, begins study at Moore Theological College with BCA supporting his work as a student minister at Redfern.
- The Reverend Captain Rod and Mrs Christene Oldfield commence BCA service at Cloncurry, having previously ministered at Coober Pedy, Norfolk Island and King Island.
- The Reverend David and Mrs Julie Rogers-Smith move from Launceston to Brisbane, where David commences as BCA Regional Officer for Queensland and Northern New South Wales.

Autumn 2015

- Mrs Alison Pearce, Media Communications Officer, begins maternity leave and awaits the birth of her second daughter, Isabelle.
- Mrs Janine van den Tillaart commences as BCA Print Media Communications Officer.
- The Reverend Matt Brain is consecrated as Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn.
- Pastor Grant and Mrs Kimberley Hay conclude their time with BCA, having served eight years in prison ministry in the Dioceses of Willochra and Adelaide.
- The Reverend David and Mrs Priya Morgan, BCA Field Staff at Paraburdoo and Tom Price, welcomed their first child Evangeli Anna.
- Bishop Chris McLeod, a Gurindji man, was consecrated Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Adelaide with particular responsibility for Aboriginal ministry.

Winter 2015

- BCA Field Staff, The Reverend David Mitchell is ordained presbyter in Geraldton.
- Bishop John Harrower lays up his staff after 15 years as Bishop of Tasmania. He continues to serve as BCA President.
- Mr Brian and Mrs Ali Champness commenced serving with BCA as Children's and Family Workers based in Goulburn.
- BCA launches a fresh look for an enduring mission under the theme *Going the Distance: Reaching Australia for Christ since 1919.*

Spring 2015

- The Reverends Barry Luke and Joel Hill are ordained presbyter in the Diocese of Willochra.
- The Reverend Stuart Haynes is ordained presbyter in the Diocese of Rockhampton.
- Mrs Vika Webb (nee Ta'ofi) concludes her time as Executive Assistant to the New South Wales and ACT Regional Officer having obtained alternative employment.

VALE

- Mr Ken Langshaw, who served on the SA State Committee from the late 1970s and from 1981 as Chairman of the SA-NT Regional Committee. He served on the National Council and Executive from 1983 to 1989.
- The Reverend Gordon Hargreaves, who served at Paraburdoo from 1983 to 1989.
- Sr Colleen Ennever (nee Argall), who served as a BCA Nurse at Ceduna and Penong from 1959 to 1960.
- Sr Marjorie Dixon (nee Tarr) who served at Ceduna, Penong and Tarcoola from 1954 to 1965.
- Mrs Coralie Buckland wife of Bishop Bernard. The Bucklands served at Cleve, Ceduna, Mt Magnet, Northampton, Derby, Broome and Newman.
- The Reverend Bruce Hansford, who served on Groote Eylandt from 1979 to 1982.
- Sr Marjorie Dickson, who served at Cook and Tarcoola.
- The Reverend Richard Pether, who served at Wittenoom from 1968 to 1970. During that time he began the first church in Newman.
- Mrs Beryl McLaughlin, who together with her husband Arthur, established the BCA Boys' Hostel at Broken Hill in 1950, before serving in the Girls' Hostel in Bowral from 1955 to 1960. Beryl was Secretary of the BCA Ladies Auxiliary for many years.
- Mrs Mina Whybourne, who was a long term member of the BCA Ladies' Auxiliary.
- Mrs Joan Rich, widow of former BCA National Director Bill Rich. Bill and Joan served as Field Staff in Mount Magnet from 1957 to 1959.
- Mr Ray Ctercteko, who was first elected to the BCA Council in 1969 and served as Honorary Treasurer from 1982 to 1993 and Vice President from 1992 to 1999. In 2000 he was made a Life Member of BCA.