

# THE ADDRESS OF THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR TO THE BUSH CHURCH AID SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MAY 2017

“I still call Australia home.”

This line from the iconic Peter Allen song has welcomed weary travellers and launched advertising campaigns. It also captures something essential to the identity and mission of The Bush Church Aid Society. For almost 100 years BCA has called Australia home. The men and women of our Society have prayed and given and gone to reach Australia for Christ – not because our nation is more deserving of God’s grace than any other, but because we recognise a solemn obligation to reach those who in the sovereignty of God share this continent with us.

As we approach a major milestone in our mission I want to reflect on that calling: using the image of home, drawing on the New Testament teaching of 1 Peter, and the experience of living and ministering in contemporary Australia.

## **THE CONTEXT FOR MISSION: DISLOCATION**

### *Dislocation in the Bush*

In last year’s address I reflected on our mission field – those locations which the Australian Bureau of Statistics defines as outer regional, remote and very remote. I noted that this mission field is growing and is forecast to do so into the future.

I also noted that our mission field is changing socially and economically – sometimes at a faster pace than our major capital cities. In large part because of this, the bush is experiencing a time of challenge. Adding to longstanding disadvantages in areas such as health, education and access to government services there is emerging evidence that many of the social bonds that have contributed to the resilience of rural communities are beginning to break down under the pressure of rapid change.

One way of summarising this evidence is through the image of dislocation. Sometimes dislocation is literal; people have to move home because of changes in employment or because of drought or other natural disasters, or because they need to access health care or schooling for their children. Sometimes dislocation is more personal or existential; people have a sense that the world is changing around them. They no longer ‘feel at home’ even if they haven’t moved.

### *Dislocation for Christians*

There can be an additional level of dislocation for Christians. A sense of growing disengagement with or perhaps even hostility to the Christian message can leave believers feeling that they have been displaced from their previous location in Australian culture. The revelations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Sexual Abuse, debates over proposed changes to marriage law and the often combative and polarised environment fostered by social media contribute to a sense that we are no longer at home in the way we once were.

It is perhaps no surprise that commentators in Australia and overseas are increasingly drawing on the images of exile and/or withdrawal to describe the place of God’s people in this era<sup>1</sup>. Whether by their choice or the choices of others, the assumption is that Christians are moving away from the centre towards the margins.

## **HOPE FOR MISSION: RELOCATION IN CHRIST**

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<sup>1</sup> From Australia: Mark Sayers *Disappearing Church: From Cultural Relevance to Gospel Resilience* (Moody Press, 2016); From the United Kingdom: Anna Strhan *Aliens and Strangers? The Struggle for Coherence in the Everyday Lives of Evangelicals* (Oxford University Press, 2015); From the United States: Rod Dreher *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (Penguin Random House, 2017).

Is the above a reason for hope or a counsel for despair? Before we consider the implications for mission down under I want to explore some parallels from the New Testament book of 1 Peter.

### *Dislocation and Relocation in 1 Peter<sup>2</sup>*

Right from the beginning we meet images of dislocation. In 1:1 the recipients of the letter are addressed as “God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” and in 2:11 they are described as “resident aliens and foreigners.” There is a double meaning here. On the one hand it reflects the fact that they had been dislocated geographically, perhaps from Rome to modern-day Turkey. But it also reflects the social dislocation that had happened when they turned to Christ. Their faith had introduced them to trials (1:7), false accusations of wrongdoing (2:12), insults (3:9), abuse (4:4) and various types of suffering (4:13). They no longer felt at home in familiar places and amongst familiar faces.

However, in Chapter two the image of dislocation is reversed. Instead of being scattered, they have now come together “like living stones...being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (2:5). They are relocated in Christ, established as the new people of God. In 1 Peter 2:9 we are given three characteristics of this people. First, they are **a people of grace**, “a chosen people”, their election grounded not in past performance or future potential but in the abundant mercy of God. Second, they are a **royal and priestly people**, “a royal priesthood, a holy nation”. As a royal people they mediate God’s rule to the world, not by domination but by the same humble service that marked the ministry of King Jesus. As a priestly people they represent the world to God in prayer and God to the world through words of witness. Third, they are **a deeply valued people**, “God’s special possession.”

Their relocation in Christ does not overturn either their geographical or social dislocation; rather it is their alien presence among the nations which expresses their central role in God’s plan for all humanity. Here is hope for mission; it is as the new people of God, dislocated in the world’s eyes yet securely relocated in Christ that they find their true calling. That was true then; it is true for us today as well.

### *Relocation in Contemporary Australia*

What might that calling look like in contemporary Australia?

The just-released McCrindle report on Faith and Belief in Australia<sup>3</sup> identifies some of the challenges facing Christians who want to reach our nation for Jesus. Less than half of Australians (45 per cent) now practise or identify with Christianity. According to those surveyed the biggest blocker that stops Australians engaging with Christianity is the Church’s stance and teaching on homosexuality (47 per cent) and the most negative influence on their perception of Christianity is church abuse (73 per cent). Here is the basis for our feeling of exile.

However, there is also a story of hope in the data. When non-Christians know one or more Christians personally the most common words they use to describe those Christians are “caring”, “loving” and “kind”. Likewise, while many Australians do not know much about their local churches, only nine per cent believe churches have a negative impact in their area compared to forty-four per cent who believe they have a positive impact.

To sum up: the more Christians are able to foster relational connections, both individually and corporately, at the local level the more chance we will overcome the ‘big picture’ stereotypes that seem to dominate the public conversation. It is as we embrace the reality that we are scattered among people who see the world differently to us that God will give us opportunities to give a reason for the hope (and the love, and the care, and the kindness) that is within us – see 1 Peter 3:15-16.

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<sup>2</sup> In considering the letter of 1 Peter I have benefitted from the insights of Karen Jobes’ commentary in the BECNT series (Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> *Faith and Belief in Australia: A national study on religion, spirituality and worldview trends May 2017*. The report is based on a nationally representative survey of 1024 Australians conducted in January 2017 and focus groups with 26 non-Christians held in Sydney in March 2017.

More than ever, it is vital that BCA sends men and women who are committed to encouraging communities of faith that are securely grounded in the Lord Jesus Christ, authentically caring in their relationships and intentionally connected with their communities.

### **MEETING OUR MISSION: PURSUING OUR PRIOTITIES**

In 2015 we established **six key priority areas** to guide our work as we seek to encourage the establishment and growth of churches which live out the vision above.

- Bringing the gospel of Christ to the outermost parts of Australia
- Developing a new generation of culturally diverse Christian leaders
- Supporting ministry by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Planting and renewing sustainable churches
- Equipping local leaders for fruitful ministry
- Providing care in Christ's Name

We continue to ask Field Staff to reflect and report on their ministries under the above headings. Throughout 2016 and early 2017 we have highlighted the areas in themed editions of *The Real Australian* magazine. At our October 2016 Conference Field Staff assigned themselves to six learning communities, each of which engaged with a key priority area under the following headings:

- What are the main challenges and opportunities you have encountered in this area?
- What resources you have found helpful in this area?
- What strategies or initiatives might you adopt in this area?

From these conversations we have drawn up a list of over 40 strategies or initiatives to be implemented across the spectrum of BCA operations – from how to recruit, appoint and resource new Field Staff to how we train existing Field Staff, network with other Christian organisations and communicate our vision to current and potential supporters. I continue to work with our Senior Officer Team on developing those initiatives which are achievable with current resources. We will also work at the Council/Executive level to consider each of these key priority areas in turn and identify where allocation of new resources or re-allocation of existing resources is necessary to see them move forward. An early example of such thinking is the appointment of The Revd Neville Naden as BCA's first full-time Indigenous Ministry Officer, with a brief to help us progress the third key priority area above.

### **MEETING OUR MISSION: COMMUNICATING OUR MESSAGE**

Throughout 2016 we continued to pursue **innovation** across our print, online and social media platforms. Our communications team has established a regular schedule for Field Staff to send out their email prayer newsletters and we have worked to coincide the release of the first edition of a newsletter with announcements on the Facebook pages of Field Staff. At deputations we have begun inviting people to sign up to BCA directly via our website using their smartphone or other electronic device. Increasingly people's initial and perhaps only means of contact with BCA will be via digital means. We have sought to respond to this by developing an electronic edition of *The Real Australian*. More than a link to a PDF of the print edition this is a resource tailor-made for an era in which more people are using their hand-held electronic device as their chosen means of connection with the wider world.

Alongside innovation we are using the capability of our database for regular **evaluation** of the effectiveness of these various strategies. So, for example, we know that in 2016 we added around 1500 new individual supporters and a further 650 in the first four months of 2017. We have also worked with an external consultant to assess the 'health' of our donor base. This showed that while we do well in adding new donors we have a higher than average attrition rate of existing donors (this almost certainly reflects the age profile of our supporters) and that this attrition rate is highest among our core donors, ie those who have a long history of regular giving. We are seeking to respond to this information in two ways; first, by assessing our effectiveness in moving people from the initial point of contact to their first donation and second, by developing a new regular giving program to sit aside our BCA Boxes.

## **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. At the close of 2016 we were supporting frontline ministry in 14 of the 23 Dioceses of the Anglican Church of Australia. A number of our ministries have an inter-denominational character and we continue to strengthen our ties with a number of Bible and theological colleges.

At the National Office we welcomed Mr Greg Bridge as Chief Operating Officer, stepping into the role occupied so capably by Mrs Robyn Williams for over 16 years. Our Accounts (Ms Desiree Chan and Mrs Philippa McLoughlin) and Communications (Miss Melinda Law and Mrs Janine van den Tillaart) teams ensure that the resources God provides through our supporters are allocated where they are needed and that people are informed what God is doing to change lives, build His church and transform communities. Mr Philip Lidbetter has continued to develop the effectiveness of our database systems and my PA, Mrs Rebecca Jeavons, blesses me and many others with her efficiency and cheerfulness.

Throughout 2016 we were blessed with an unchanged and servant-hearted Regional Officer team. It has been exciting to see how new initiatives developed in one Region are being shared and implemented in others, such as annual get-togethers for former Field Staff and electronic Regional Newsletters.

So, do we still call Australia home? Writing to the Philippian Christians Paul reminds them, and us, that "our citizenship is in heaven." (Philippians 3:20). His purpose in doing so is *not* to encourage, despair or disengage, but to equip believers with such a secure grounding in the Lord Jesus that they can live out the values of the coming Kingdom wherever they are. That is our calling and the calling of the ministries we support – to do here in this land what Christians have been doing as God's royal and priestly people for the past 2000 years. May God keep us faithful to that calling so we might go the distance in reaching Australia for Christ until He returns.



**The Reverend Dr Mark Short**  
**National Director**

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

### Summer 2016

- Mr Greg Bridge commences as BCA's Chief Operating Officer and Mrs Robyn Williams retires as BCA's Administration Manager after over 16 years' service.
- Mrs Heather Joyce commences as Executive Assistant in the NSW/ACT Office.
- The Revd Roger and Mrs Amanda Kyngdon and their daughters Ada and Eliza move to Bluff Point in Western Australia, where Roger commences a two-year Ministry Training Arrangement. Soon afterwards they welcome a third child, Benjamin.
- The Revd Capt Graeme and Mrs Susan Liersch take up the role of BCA Field Staff in Longreach/Barcaldine.
- The Revd Peter and Mrs Joy Palmer conclude their time as BCA Field Staff and move to Brisbane, where Peter is appointed Priest-in-charge of the Parish of Beenleigh.
- Mr Ran and Mrs Jenny Mitchell conclude their time as Drought Family Support Workers to focus on ministry in their local Parish.
- The Revd Dr Richard Condie is installed as Bishop of Tasmania.
- Former BCA State Secretary and Councillor, Mr Allan Sauer is awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the Australia Day Honours.

### Autumn 2016

- Mr Peter Volkofsky commences with BCA under the Bush Scripture Initiative. A key aspect of his role is to develop resources for use in remote schools.
- The Revd Mary and Dr Owen Lewis conclude their term as BCA Field Staff at Roxby Downs and move to Port Pirie where Mary is appointed Dean of the Cathedral.
- Shortly after Mr Lindsay Whybrow sustains a spinal injury, he and his wife, Carolyn, finish as BCA Field Staff in Hillston, NSW. They settle in their new home in Uralla, NSW.
- The Revd Kristan and Mrs Kathryn Slack are commissioned as BCA Field Staff to serve in Katherine in the Northern Territory.
- Mrs Helen Caterer (OBE), long-term supporter of BCA and author of our 60-year history receives an OAM in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

### Winter 2016

- The Revd Joel and Mrs Hannah Hill, serving with BCA in Roxby Downs, welcome Albert Simon into the world.
- The Revd David and Mrs Joanne Piper, Field Staff in Lightning Ridge, welcome Matthew into the world.
- The Revd Brad and Dr Jo Henley, serving on Kangaroo Island, are blessed with the birth of Evangeline Sophia.
- Miss Jordan Gallagher joins the NSW/ACT team as Youth Promotions Officer.
- Mrs Monica Short launches her BCA-supported publication *Three Anglican Churches Engaging with People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds* at an event in Bendigo.

### Spring 2016

- The BCA Biennial Field Staff Conference is held on the Sunshine Coast. Everyone is encouraged by The Revd Rod Chiswell from God's word and equipped for healthy and sustainable ministry.
- The Revds Brian and Ali Champness, Field Staff in Goulburn, are ordained priests in St Saviour's Cathedral.
- The Revd Gary and Mrs Nicole Alexander along with Thomas and Tobias finish their term as Field Staff in Kununurra.

- Dusty Boots Coordinators, The Revd Rob and Mrs Jenny Stubbs, and Ms Beth Hazell conclude their service with BCA. The program has seen hundreds of high school students experience a taste of life and service in the bush.
- The Revd Capt Stuart and Capt Katherine Haynes, together with Christina conclude their time with BCA in Moranbah, having previously served in Blackwater. They move to the Bega Valley in New South Wales.
- The Revd Irfon and Mrs Barbara Griffiths finish their service in St Leonards, Tasmania and move back to Sydney.
- The Revd Joel and Mrs Hannah Hill, together with Amy, Finnegan, John and Albert complete their two year placement in Roxby Downs and move to a ministry position in Taree, New South Wales.

## VALE

**June Armstrong** (20 July 1925 – 18 April 2016) served as a nurse at the BCA Mission Hostel in Ceduna from 1949–1951 and 1953–1955.

**Mrs May Buckingham** (23 March 1928 – 22 February 2016) together with her husband Roy (deceased) served as BCA Field Staff in Karratha from 1984–1990 and Geraldton from 1990–1992. After retirement, they moved to the Anglican retirement village at Castle Hill, NSW where May continued her association with BCA serving as the President of the Castle Hill Villages BCA Auxiliary.

**Mr Stan Drew (19 June 1927 – 28 May 2016)** together with his wife Elaine served as houseparents at the BCA Children’s Hostel in Broken Hill during the 1980s.

**Mrs Hazel Fuhrmeister** (2 March 1922 – 8 August 2016) together with her husband George (deceased) served with BCA in Minnipa, South Australia (1950–1956), Quorn, South Australia (1956–1962) and Wilcannia, New South Wales (1978–1983).

**The Revd Peter George** (5 November 1933 – 15 September 2016) was ordained a Deacon in the Diocese of Sydney in 1961 and Priest that same year. Together with wife Fay and children Philip and Lynette, Peter became the first BCA Missioner (Field Staff) in Townview-Gunpowder, one of the suburbs of Mount Isa, serving there for three years from 1970–1973.

**The Revd Ron Keynes** (23 October 1934 – 11 May 2016) served with BCA at Leigh Creek from 1963–1966 and Ceduna from 1966–1969. He was also a much loved minister in the Canberra & Goulburn Diocese.

**The Revd Ian Robertson** (19 February 1931 – 1 July 2016) together with his wife Robin served with BCA for four and a half years at Coober Pedy. Upon advising BCA that they would be finishing their service in January 1993 Ian and Robin said “We love BCA and will be sorry when these last few months are over. The love and support which have been showered upon us has been simply marvellous and we praise the Lord for the privilege of serving in this place.”

**Mavis Skinner** (26 December 1921– 19 September 2016) served with BCA as a nurse in Ceduna from 1955–1965. Remembering her time in Ceduna in the winter 1997 edition of *The Real Australian* she said “Yes, 10 years with BCA; what a privilege and I thank my Heavenly Father for calling me to this work.”

**The Revd Peter Leonard Swane** (2 November 1940 – 11 February 2016) was ordained a priest in 1963 in Armidale. He and wife Margaret served with BCA in the parish of Ashford/Delungra/Tingha from 1972. He also served as a BCA councillor.

**The Revd Owen Thomas** (24 February 1934 – 12 July 2016) was the South Australian State Secretary from September 1995 until August 1999. During his time as State Secretary Owen provided pastoral care for the South Australian Field Staff and broadened BCA’s support base.