



# The Address of the National Director to the Annual General Meeting of the Bush Church Aid Society May 2020

## Introduction

It is such an honour to write the first of what I pray will be many National Director's reports to the Executive of BCA. I am humbled to serve in this role and be part of such a rich history of gospel ministry in this nation. And it is such an honour to write this, the report on our Centenary year.

From the outset I do need to acknowledge the contribution of my predecessors, both Mark Short and David Crain, to what I hope has been a smooth handover. They have been, and continue to be, a valuable source of encouragement and knowledge.

My first few months have been a blur in many ways. There has been of course getting to know the National Office team and they me, forming a working relationship with the Senior Officers, beginning to engage with our field staff and supporter base, growing in my understanding of the mechanics of BCA, and establishing relationships with various dioceses, bishops and other important organisations.

## Centenary

As I previously mentioned, it is an honour to report on our Centenary however I must say I feel ill-equipped to do it justice. That assessment is based on the fact that I had nothing to do with the planning and was only here for the tail end of it. With that said it might be that I am also uniquely placed to comment on it from an outside perspective.

I believe the Society and all who were involved in the planning and celebrations excelled themselves. The numerous thanksgiving services, the centenary book "*Never To Far, Never To Few*", the special funding grants, the Christian Fellowship Tours "*BCA Centenary Tour*", the social media and entire library of *Real Australian* magazines online, and who could forget the numerous celebratory cakes, are just some of the many aspects of the year that come to mind.

I can tell you that I often read parts of the centenary book, which is such an incredible resource, and marvel at the 100 years of service and sometimes sacrifice that many have made. I have also found access to the entire library of *Real Australian* magazines online a useful resource when needing to research a particular aspect of BCA's ministry.

## First 100 Days

I began this role in August 2019 with a strategy for my first 100 days. Not only does 'the first 100 days' sound strategic, but it also formed a logical block. That is, the first 100 days, not counting days off, ended just before Christmas and coincided with being close to the end of the reporting period for the AGM.

In that time I made a priority to know the Office Staff and Regional Officers whom I work closely with. I also made a priority to contact dioceses and bishops that I didn't know that well or needed to know better. I also asked questions! I asked questions of anyone who stood still long enough for me to open my mouth. In fact, my first trip happened to be with Bishop Mark Short who I suspect was somewhat exhausted by the time he finished answering my first four pages of questions.

Furthermore, if the opportunity presented itself, I made an effort to visit Field Staff. One such opportunity was all of the Field Staff from North West Australia at one campsite which certainly saved some time travelling. There was also a visit to Tasmania to meet with our Field Staff there minus the Thiele's on King Island who I will have to make a special trip for.

A practice that I have also initiated and attempted to maintain is ringing one of our Field Staff most days to touch base. It is my hope to hear their heart for ministry and to pray for them. This is not meant to replace visiting them in situ and I will place a priority on this.

## **Continuing our Priorities**

It is my understanding that at the 2015 AGM the preparation was laid for what later became the Key Priorities that form the current strategic direction of BCA. In these last 12 months the Society has continued to develop and review its work under each of the 6 areas.

### *Bringing the gospel of Christ to the outermost parts of Australia*

As you read through the annual reports from Field Staff it is obvious that this is a primary focus for BCA and rightly so. This focus has seen the Society engage in renewed opportunities in locations such as Croajingolong, which has the township of Cann River within the parish boundaries. Cann River was the third location that BCA sent someone to in those early years and it is exciting to partner there again.

In partnership with many dioceses we continue to look at new opportunities to reach rural, regional or remote parts of Australia with the gospel.

### *Developing a new generation of culturally diverse Christian leaders*

The recent trend for Dioceses to seek support for connecting with younger generations continues. In 2019 the Diocese of Bendigo saw the beginning of two such placements and the Executive have approved such a ministry opportunity for a coastal parish in North Queensland diocese and are looking to finalise the search process.

I also read with interest how many of the Field Staff, in what might be called traditional parish-based ministries, have a focus on children's and youth ministry. This should come as no surprise given the large number of Field Staff with young families themselves. Furthermore, consider many of our locations, such as mining towns, that can have an influx of young families with few local connections looking for community.

### *Supporting ministry by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people*

Both the support and focus of the Society for this priority remain strong. In conjunction with Neville Naden and his committee we are addressing more of the actions within the strategic plan for Indigenous ministry. In particular we now support 3 Indigenous Field Staff including George and Carmel Ferguson who recently moved to lead the Barwon Special District which encompasses the parishes of Walgett and Collarenebri in the Diocese of Armidale. The Society has also identified 3 theological students (2 at Moore College Sydney and 1 at Ridley College Melbourne) who have been given a grant to assist in their studies.

### *Planting and renewing sustainable Churches*

In 2019 Trent and Alison McGrath were selected as the Field Staff to establish the new church plant in Jindabyne. This has been a project that had been many years in the planning and praying. They began early in 2020. This brings the total number of specific church plants that BCA is partnered with to three.

### *Equipping local leaders for fruitful ministry*

As I speak with Field Staff I hear often of their focus on equipping the local saints for leadership and ministry. There are of course mixed results from time to time and in the country, like it so often appears to be in the cities, there will be a reliance on the ordained person to be the doer. That said, I am encouraged by the perseverance to invest in the local leadership across the locations in which we partner.

### *Providing care in Christ's Name*

The drought continued to bring great hardship across the greater majority of Australia in 2019. As has been our previous practise we dispersed funds to various parishes and dioceses that made application to us. The majority of applications allowed the purchase of locally sourced supplies and the like which could be used in direct pastoral engagement with people in need.

As we ended the year and entered into summer more hardship came in the devastating bushfires. In particular large areas of NSW, Victoria and South Australia were affected. Again, many BCA supporters were generous in their giving to help these areas and significant funds from the Kirkby Trust have been made available. Numerous disbursements have already been made and more have been approved and are awaiting the approved programs to begin.

## Financial Position and Supporter Base

I will leave detailed information on the 2019 finances to those charged with that duty but let me highlight a few notable items. It is due to God's grace and the generosity of our supporters that we can report that BCA continues to be in a strong position financially. This is due in no small part to supporter income being the highest amount recorded in the Society's history and exceeding budget in combination with the number of bequests received, the success of the 2019 appeals, and investment gains over the period. Our Regional Officers and I continue to focus on building and energising our supporter base. While there will always be much to do in this area, I am encouraged by anecdotal reports of new younger supporters.

## Thank You

I have only been part of the 'BCA Family' for a few months but already I have begun to appreciate the incredible number of servant-hearted Christian brothers and sisters who support this Society. Can I say thank you for the welcome you have given both myself and Karen. I hesitate to thank individuals for the fear of missing someone. However, I must note the contribution the Senior Officers and Office Staff make in supporting me in this role. I appreciate your dedication and understanding. Thank you also to the Council, Executive and various committee members who give so generously of your time and expertise.

Finally thank you to the various volunteers, Nomads and the unseen supporters who hold us in prayer. Thank you for your faithfulness.

## Vale

I acknowledge before God those sisters and brothers we have farewelled in 2019:

The Reverend Frederick Buchanan – February 2019  
Bishop Stanley Bruce Rosier AM - February 2019  
The Revd Edwin Charles White "Charlie" - April 2019  
The Revd Bruce Chapman - May 2019  
The Revd Colin Wilson - August 2019  
Mrs Barbara Beard - September 2019  
Mrs Phyllis Collie - October 2019  
Mr Robert Stubbs - October 2019  
Mrs Gladys Connell - October 2019  
(source: Real Australian Post & Rails 2019)

## Where to From Here

I remember in my very first parish visualising ministry to be similar to that of a farmer with an unimaginably large farm with countless paddocks and fields. From a theological sense there are numerous biblical examples of agricultural analogies. Yet what I came to understand was that normally there were too many fields to plough or paddocks to muster stock in for the number of hours in a day. It required prayerfully and strategically considering what a good use of my time was in that context.

It will probably come as no surprise that this realisation for me in my first parish has once again come to my mind. There are a number of fields that BCA is ploughing in and many of them will continue. It may be that in time God will call us to leave some fallow. In so doing it may mean we can then sow in other up until now untouched fields.

This may sound somewhat cryptic and lacking in detail and I acknowledge that. My focus at the moment is to keep going in our current direction and learning not only the ropes but also how many fields and paddocks there might be within the rural, regional and remote landscape that is our mission field. I suspect like previous National Directors I will be able to in time bring to the Council and Executive my own recommendations for ministry priorities and systems and processes to undertake them. In all this I ask that you might continue to pray that I might have great wisdom and perseverance.

Every blessing in Christ.



**The Revd Canon Greg Harris**  
**National Director – The Bush Church Aid Society of Australia**