

The Address of the National Director to the Bush Church Aid Society Annual General Meeting May 2019

The View from the Dock

The scene recorded in Acts 20:17-38 is surely one of the most poignant in all the New Testament. As he prepares to board a ship to Jerusalem the Apostle Paul shares his heart with his friends from Ephesus knowing they will not see each other again this side of glory. While there is much in the passage that is unique to Paul and his circumstances there is one verse that has been on my mind as I prepare to conclude my time as National Director of The Bush Church Aid Society:

“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” (v32)

When a small group of men and women gathered almost 100 years ago to establish the work that became BCA they were committing their hopes and dreams to God, to His gracious word. It is that same grace that has sustained the Society and those who have served under its banner during the years that followed; it is the same word that will guide its work into the future amidst the changes and chances of an uncertain world. When we look back at 2018 we discern many signs of God’s gracious word at work.

Meeting our Mission: Pursuing our Priorities

The Society has continued to develop and review its work under each of its Key Priority Areas:

Bringing the gospel of Christ to the outermost parts of Australia

Sharing the good news of Jesus continues to be central to the ministry of all BCA’s Field Staff and Senior Officers. Towards the end of 2018 we approved a new evangelistic and training ministry to be based in the Diocese of North West Australia at Geraldton. Under God, we hope this new work will bear the same kind of fruit we have seen through the work of James and Brittany Daymond in their evangelistic ministry at Narromine.

Developing a new generation of culturally diverse Christian leaders

In recent years there has been a growing trend for Dioceses to seek the support of the Society for ministries designed to connect churches with the so-called ‘missing generations’ who are largely absent from their common life. This type of broader equipping ministry was pioneered first by the Chapmans in the Diocese of the Northern Territory, more recently by the Reeves in the Diocese of Graton and in 2018 we approved funding for a new Youth and Families Ministry Development Officer in the Diocese of Bendigo.

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

The Revd Neville Naden continued to develop his work as BCA’s first full-time Indigenous Ministry Officer. This included the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan and an explicitly Christian Acknowledgement of Country which is intended for use by churches and schools as well as BCA. Neville and Kathie’s son Nathaniel completed his studies at Moore Theological College, having been supported by a BCA Indigenous Ministry Bursary and George and Carmel Ferguson commenced ministry training position based in the Parish of South Tamworth.

Planting and renewing sustainable Churches

For decades BCA has been involved in planting and nurturing new churches, most often in areas which are both growing in population and relatively unchurched. That is certainly the case in Tasmania, where we continued to fund the ministry of Chris and Naomi Duff at Brighton and Jamie and Claire Bester at the Southern Beaches. In 2019 we are planning to work in partnership with the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn in a church revitalisation work in Jindabyne, in the shadow of the Snowy Mountains. It is hoped this may be the best step in renewal of ministry throughout the Monaro, which was one of the first regions visited by SJ Kirkby in his early days as BCA’s first Organising Missioner.

Equipping local leaders for fruitful ministry

Personal encouragement and coaching is vital to the development and resilience of lay leadership in bush churches. Modern technologies open up the opportunity for such encouragement to be delivered in new ways. BCA has partnered with Ridley College and the Diocese of Tasmania to launch the Digital Church Pilot Project. This innovative initiative will use video recording and video conferencing to deliver quality teaching to more remote churches as well as helping leaders in those churches launch mission-focussed small groups that connect with their broader communities.

Providing care in Christ's Name

Drought made an unwelcome return to the eastern seaboard in 2018. BCA made grants to over a dozen churches in drought affected districts to respond in ways that appropriate to their particular needs. Initiatives included pastoral visiting, the preparation of food parcels and pamper packs and the delivery of dog food to properties that might otherwise have needed to dispose of their treasured working animals.

All this work was underpinned by an extensive system of pastoral and prayer support for Field Staff. Feedback from those Field Staff in their Annual Reports is reviewed to ensure that our care continues to be timely and focussed.

In October 2018 we gathered over 150 staff, supporters and volunteers in Marysville Victoria for our largest ever biennial Field Staff Conference. A major focus of the time was equipping staff with teaching and resources to help them serve faithfully and fruitfully in a challenging environment. We were particularly blessed by an excellent children's and youth program delivered by the team from Quizworx and staff and volunteers from the Parish of Diamond Creek.

Meeting our Mission: Communicating our Message

By God's grace BCA has a wonderful story to share and we continue to look for new and creative ways to share it with Australian Christians so they can engage with God's work through prayer, giving and personal involvement.

It is particularly encouraging to report that our 2018 donation income of \$2.928 million was an all-time record and an increase of 11 per cent on the previous year. The majority of this increase came from individual donors, including a small number of significant one-off gifts. Giving through online channels increased from \$238,000 to \$248,000.

It is of some concern that the number of new supporters added in 2018 (1147) was substantially down on the same number for the previous year (1926). This highlights the ongoing challenge to connect with those who do not yet know our work – including younger Christians and those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Our imminent centenary celebrations are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to spread the word. Our communications team and others have prepared a terrific suite of centenary resources which can be accessed at www.bushchurcaid.com.au/100. There you can find centenary logos, a centenary prayer, five short compelling videos highlighting different aspects of BCA's work and an order form for our centenary book *Never Too Far: Never Too Few*, which has been authored by Mrs Robyn Powell. By the time this report is delivered I expect these resources will have been shared extensively through email and social media, but it is not too late to ensure that the church where you worship is making use of them, particularly on Sunday May 26.

Partners in Mission

During the past seven and a half years I have been blessed to serve alongside some wonderful, servant-hearted brothers and sisters in Christ. I have been inspired by the courage and initiative of our Field Staff, sustained by the dedication and competence of our home-based staff and blessed and grown through the fellowship of a small army of unpaid workers, particularly those who've chosen to serve on the BCA Council and other committees. By God's grace I believe BCA is blessed with a healthy, Christ-centred culture. However, such blessings can and should never be taken for granted and we all have the responsibility of ensuring they are protected and passed on to the generations that are to come.

I also want to thank God for the love and encouragement of my wife Monica and our children Andrew and Matthew, recognising the loads they have carried particularly when their husband and father has been away from home.

I also acknowledge before God those sisters and brothers we have farewelled in 2018:

- ❖ The Reverend Tom Williams, who with his wife Carol served at Paraburdoo, Wickham, Kununurra and Tennant Creek
- ❖ Miss Betty Tierney, who served with BCA as a nurse in Ceduna.
- ❖ Mrs Joyce Hayman, who together with husband Theo served at Streaky Bay and Ceduna. They later moved to Adelaide and then to Sydney, where Theo served as Federal Secretary
- ❖ Mrs Rhi Jones, who together with her husband Greg served in the Murchison and Mt Magnet before returning to Victoria where Greg served as Regional Officer
- ❖ Deaconess Pamela Crew (nee Eagleton) who served with BCA as a Parish worker in Nightcliff Darwin between 1973 and 1977.

May the same grace which sustained them in their journey enable us to go the distance in faithfulness to Jesus, so that together we might reach Australia for Christ.



The Revd Dr Mark Short
National Director
The Bush Church Aid Society of Australia
(2011 – March 2019)