

ADDRESS TO BCA NATIONAL COUNCIL

Firstly, my thanks to our chairman Fred Chilton for the invitation to attend this meeting and for the honour of being able to share with you today, some reflections on my time with the Committee of the South Australian & Northern Territory region. It is also a pleasure to see some familiar faces here from my time serving on this Council and those of people who have ministered in our Region.

Brian & I had a discussion about what I should say today & he suggested that the title could be “From Conception to Retirement – my life with BCA”. Now that may seem somewhat tongue in cheek, but it is true.

Dad & Mum went out with BCA to Wilcannia in 1936. It was their honeymoon, Dad had only had his driving licence for a short time and they were going to their first parish. They returned towards the end of 1938 and I was born in March 1939 – so you do the maths!

I can't recall dates and names, but during my childhood and teenage years, there were a number of visits from BCA staff to the parishes in which we lived, and it was always interesting to hear of the way in which these people were serving God under what seemed to me, fairly primitive conditions. My parents always promoted BCA wherever they were and I suppose that it's no wonder that some of the catechists and curates who worked with them eventually went out to minister with the Society. You may recall names like Arthur & Pat Williams, Bernard & Coralie Buckland, Barry & Jenny Rainsford, John Whyndham, all of whom I imagine were inspired and encouraged by Dad & Mum to consider the call of ministry to the outback. Probably my interest in BCA is by osmosis or because it was the mission agency of choice spoken most about at home during my formative years.

Interestingly enough, it wasn't until Dr Leon Morris was in Adelaide to launch his book “Bush Parson”, about his time at Wudinna, that I learned from him that it was due to Dad's witness to him, when he was in the young peoples' Fellowship at All Souls'

Leichhardt that he was led to Christ, then to the ministry, and as we know to his one & only parish, coincidentally with BCA.

After school, I went into a career in sales and marketing mainly in the grocery industry and in 1980 I was transferred by the company I worked for at the time, to Adelaide to be sales manager and with my late wife Pam and our two children became members of Holy Trinity. One morning I read the lesson in the morning service and afterwards a grey haired gentleman came up to me and said “You know, we’ve lived in the same house, only many years apart”. I thought that a little strange until he introduced himself as Alban Kirkby. Yes, we had lived in the Rectory at St Anne’s Ryde. Another BCA connection!! Alb asked me if I’d stand for election to the South Australian Committee the next year, and as they say the rest is history!!

We’ve been through many changes over the past 25 years in South Australia. After succeeding Rev’d Tom Jones as Chairman, I’ve had the privilege of working with seven State Secretaries/Regional Officers, three of whom came to the role after ministering with the Society, but all have shown a passion for the gospel and its place in the work and ministry of BCA, despite differing degrees of ‘Anglicanism’.

We’ve had four different office locations, from the back room in a parish hall, sharing an accountant’s office, co-existing with Diocesan functionaries and been with CMS in their office. Around twenty different people have served as Committee members who have come from the three dioceses of our Province, and so I have been able to experience the colourful and interesting tapestry of the Anglican church. Ian Barlow, was a member of our Committee in the 1990’s and travelled down from the mid-North of the state every month for the meetings, to represent the Diocese of Willochra. He was an Archdeacon at the time and had great delight in telling people who asked him what his role was in the Diocese, that an Archdeacon was ‘the crook on the Bishop’s staff!’

The changes haven’t just been confined to the Committee, for as we all know the ministry of BCA is one which is ever changing in location and personnel. When I first

came onto the Committee we had nurses at Tarcoola and Cook hospitals and a ministry to the Trans Line based in Port Augusta, as well as children at the Hostel in Broken Hill. These have all either concluded or changed focus. I recall going with a group of supporters over to Cook for the opening & dedication of the new facilities and having the privilege of meeting Bishop Bruce Rosier for the first time. Another thing which sticks in my mind about that trip, on arriving in Cook was remarking to one of the locals that there weren't any cars to be seen. "No, mate" he replied, 'They're all locked up in our yards, because the cop from Tarcoola is here today, and none of the cars are registered, so he'd have to book us all for having unregistered vehicles. We're just saving him the trouble!'. On the other hand some things don't change and we are still providing ministries to Coober Pedy, Leigh Creek and the western parts of NSW, but in addition to that, the mining town of Roxby Downs and most recently Kangaroo Island have become part of the BCA family.

With my wife Judy, I've had the opportunity to visit a number of BCA ministries in our region, either privately or in an official capacity. We were members of a bus tour led by Rev'd Owen Thomas some years ago which took in all the locations in the South Australian/western NSW part of our region, and it was a great joy to share not only with the field staff but also with some of the people they ministered to in their vast parishes.

We still have contact with some former field staff who live in and around Adelaide. Ann Beadnall who was at Coober Pedy with Ian is the vice president of the Adelaide Auxiliary. Ian & Robyn Robertson, also formerly of Coober Pedy, live south of the city and visit Adelaide a few times each year. Jim & Ruth Stocks who were house parents at the Broken Hill hostel are living near the Adelaide CBD and are regular worshippers at Trinity. Marjorie Dickson who was a nurse at both Tarcoola and Cook hospitals is planning a trip to South America next year, God willing, to celebrate her 80th birthday.

Representing BCA at official Diocesan functions across the Province, has also given me the chance to tell others from our denomination about the ethos of the Society

and so hopefully allay some misconceptions which, unfortunately are held by those not fully conversant with evangelical mission societies.

One of the great joys I've experienced was going back to Wilcannia a few years ago for the 60th anniversary of BCA's ministry in the area. My Dad was asked to be the preacher at that service as he was the oldest surviving former BCA minister. The anniversary coincided with the Diocese of the Riverina's annual Synod and a number of delegates were billeted at BCA House in Broken Hill. Apart from Judy and myself, Brian & Denyse and Bob & Rigmor George also were representing BCA. What a great occasion it was!! (*Even though our little bus broke down on the way to Wilcannia from Broken Hill and it had to be repaired and make its way more slowly, so that the service was a little late in starting. Some people rudely suggested that it was because it was overloaded.*) St James was full, probably for the first time in years, and the singing was powerful and of course, so was the preaching!! As a matter of fact one of the BCA clergy who was there said it was 'just good old fashioned Gospel preaching'.

That evening, we all went to one of the clubs in Broken Hill for a meal. During the evening one of the club officials came up to us and said "We've had a whip around for the hostel, Reverend and here's the money" with that he handed Brian some money, I don't know how much it was, but what it shows is how much people in these communities appreciate the work & ministry of the Society.

During Bob George's time as Regional Officer I was granted a Lay-Deputationist's licence for the Diocese of Adelaide, to help deputations to parishes, and it has proved to be useful during interregnums between Regional Officers. I also have had permission from successive Bishops of Willochra to preach in their Diocese as well, and occasionally I've been able to sneak over the border into the Diocese of the Murray at the invitation of various parish clergy. These opportunities are rare for a lay preacher in South Australia, as a lot of ministers really only want someone to come and take a whole service while they are on leave, but when the opportunity is given I'm more than willing to take it!!

A couple of incidents when I have taken deputations come to mind. In a suburban parish where the long-serving Box Secretary had recently retired due to ill health, I mentioned the need for someone to take on the job. The parish priest came to me after the service and said “I’ve got the right person for that job!!” I felt a little embarrassed for the poor lady who seemed to have been conscripted into the job, but she had been helped spiritually and emotionally by one of our field staff at Leigh Creek several years earlier and had a great respect for the mission of BCA. That was about 8 years ago and that lady is still faithfully serving BCA in her parish.

In a more light-hearted vein, Judy & I, one Sunday in July went to the parishes of Mount Pleasant and Mannum for deputations. (*Mount Pleasant was an 8am Eucharist, and it was freezing!! but we went ahead with a small but faithful congregation, most of whom listened bravely although with quite a lot of shivering.*) We had a very fast drive to Mannum, following the minister who drove like he was practicing for the F1 Grand Prix. We arrived with about 10 minutes to spare before the service began and sat down while I quietly began to collect my thoughts. Suddenly, Judy nudged me in the ribs and whispered “Can you hear what the organist’s playing?” I listened more closely and then it came to me the tune was “Puff the Magic Dragon”!!!! It was quite difficult to remain composed after that.

(I always seem to get deputations during winter to the colder parts of our state. For example, in 2005 we had the invitation to go to the Kapunda district, which is one area near Adelaide which does get snow every now and again.. The first service was an 8am at one of the three centres and early on the Sunday morning the local priest knocked on our cabin door (we were staying in the caravan park) and I headed out to the car, only to find ice all over the windscreen and back window. Several buckets of warm water later to wash off the ice and we were on our way!!)

Our deputation programme has been comprehensive across the Province and has meant that the total supporter base has increased, and in God’s mercy the average age has dropped from around 70+ to somewhere in the low 60’s. However, at one stage it

seemed that we would no longer have an 'on the ground' presence for the Region in the form of a Regional Officer as our financial contribution to the Society's ministry was either miniscule or non-existent. However, with better management of our finances and reducing the Regional Officer's and Office Manager's roles to part-time positions we have been able to make improved and regular contributions to the Society, which in most cases have exceeded the budgeted expectations.

We struggle in a region which because of its small and ageing population does not have the financial wherewithal to fully support any one particular BCA ministry. As well as that, there is the undeniable fact that until recently, evangelical mission agencies have not received the recognition or official support from some of the leadership of the church. However, with recent changes in both the Adelaide and Northern Territory Dioceses and the continuing interest and support of Willochra Diocese, we can confidently look forward to a more positive attitude in our Province towards mission agencies such as ours. This is borne out by the fact that we held a Garden Party in the grounds of Bishop's Court in Adelaide in March to both raise funds and the profile of our Society in the Diocese. This was as the result of an invitation from Lindy Driver, the Archbishop's wife, to do so, after she had spoken at our Auxiliary's annual luncheon in September last year. Part of the programme at the Garden Party was the Archbishop blessing the fleece which had just been shorn in front of our guests, as well as blessing the harvest in the form of a hay bale. In his remarks after the blessings, the Archbishop commended BCA's work and said he hoped that the Garden Party would become an annual event.

As I reflect on the past twenty or so years, I'm reminded of the Parable of the Sower. There we're told that even on the good ground there wasn't always a 100% return, sometimes 60% or even just 30%, but the farmer was grateful for the crop that was harvested from all the good ground. Like any capable farmer who nurtures his land in expectation of better yields from future harvests, we promote the ministry of the Society in our Region through regular deputations, fund raising events and our weekly

radio programme “Bringing The Country Alive”, which is partly funded by our Auxiliary (*and other Christian organisations in Adelaide and is used to promote church based and other Christian activities. Each week’s programme can now be heard on the web from rphadelaide.org.au.) We use all these means to spread the word about BCA, encouraging people to pray for the Society as well as receive the “Real Australian”, and of course support the work through their gifts and donations. As we watch the harvest arrive we are grateful to God for the 30%’s as well as the 100%’s. From the box holders who once a year return their boxes with just a few dollars to the supporters who through EFT generously and regularly provide us with ongoing gifts, as well as supporting our special appeals, they are all part of that harvest which God provides for us in our Region.*

My prayer and confident expectation for the future is that the SA/NT Region will continue to grow, albeit with smaller steps than those of the more affluent areas of our land. Patience and nurture are needed from the incoming Regional Committee and its leaders, patience and nurture are needed from you also, the National Council of our beloved Society.

So, there it is. It has been a journey from conception to retirement, but retirement from ‘active duty’ with BCA does not mean that my prayers or my love & concern for BCA will diminish in any way. I’ll continue to be the Box Secretary for Holy Trinity Adelaide and have agreed to be available during the ‘settling-in’ period for the new Committee and it’s chairman should they need advice or help.

In closing let me leave you with this verse from 2 Corinthians 9:10 “Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. “

Thank you.