1 - 3 December
The Bourke Distance Education Presentation Afternoon was held in Bourke on Tuesday 1st. We attended, along with the first to arrive Bush Mission team members, Roy and June Fixter (Brisbane/itinerants), as well as fellow chaplains Steve and Rosalie Goldsmith (Presbyterian Inland Mission). An enjoyable concert and afternoon tea; with opportunity to meet many people from the outlying properties and a chance to hand out calendars/contact details.

Wednesday it was an early start to travel 180kms on gravel road to Wanaaring for Scripture at the school. Additional Bush Team members joined us for the outing – Heather and Errol Grice (Coffs Harbour), Trevor and Heather Williams (Newcastle). The 8 of us were able to see almost every one in town by visiting the local store, the hotel, the Book Exchange and Book Fair, the Mobile Preschool, the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and some door to door visits. Scripture at the school was fantastic, with brass band and timbrel participation. The 10 children reciprocated the entertainment by singing Silent Night in German for us and a very lively rendition of Six White Boomeris. An unplanned concert was held at the hotel before returning to Bourke late in the afternoon.

Thursday afternoon, Lloyd was able to take the team members on a farm tour.

4 - 9 December
Friday 4th was the official start of BM09, commencing with dinner and an impromptu concert featuring both the Brass Band and Salvo Country Band. 6 further couples had arrived to make up the full contingency. Majors Peter and Jean Ridley (Chaplains North NSW); Phil and Marilyn Butler, Lachy and Robyn McKay (Nambucca River); John and Lyn Powell, Kevin and Janelle Cause, Gordon and Lyn Jones (Taree).

Saturday morning was the first of the concerts, held at the Back O’ Bourke Exhibition Centre Café. A disappointing local attendance but enjoyed by all present as much of the Salvation Army History for Bourke was shared, along with some Henry Lawson poetry. There was a Corps in Bourke from 1888 to 1916. Thanks to the Salvo Heritage Centre, and in particular Major Bob Broadbere, for all the information. Saturday night we all travelled to Louth to take part in the village ‘Christmas Tree’, with both bands performing. A great night had by all, with most team members arriving back in Bourke around midnight.

Salvo Country Band
Sunday morning we led the Service at the Bourke Christian Church. The congregation from the Full Gospel Family Fellowship came along too, as well as some Anglican folk. Around 120 people in all. Country Band, Brass Band and the message on God’s love followed by a duet from Errol and Heather.

All the churches again came together that night for the Combined Churches ‘Carols on the Wharf’. A great night with everyone participating in the lovely outdoor setting on the historical Bourke Wharf.
Monday it was time for the first round of ‘farm’ visits. Team members split up in to smaller groups to visit local property owners/managers and an isolated small business owner. Monday night we held a BBQ and concert in the school grounds for the folk of Enngonia. Valuable contacts were made for our efforts to minister to the people of the surrounding district.

Tuesday it was again time for ‘farm visits’, with team members visiting one of the poorest farms in the area; a property with 7 children; a small business owner affected by the drought and tourism fluctuations; property owners suffering depression; and, the Rural Financial Counsellor to get an overall picture of the far-reaching consequences of the 10 year drought.

That night the BBQ and Concert was held at the Byrock Hotel. It has been difficult for us to ‘break’ into this community but after the fantastic efforts of the Bush Mission Team we feel that we will find it a little easier now.

Wednesday morning we packed up our caravans and headed off for the next leg of BM09. Along the way, we stopped off at the Brewarrina hospital/aged care facility to hold a Brass band concert and share morning tea with patients, residents, visitors and staff. As Errol was celebrating a milestone birthday that day, the staff arranged to present him with an information pack on the facilities available for persons of a mature age.

While the other team members travelled to Walgett to meet up with the Anglican Ministers, we visited a local client who had just been released from prison and then travelled south to deliver a hamper. We also met up with another one of our clients unexpectedly, who was sorry to have missed us at Enngonia.

9 - 14 December

Due to concurrent concerts and distances involved, we joined the Brass Band team members/partners at Lightning Ridge Caravan Park; and, the Ridleys took the Country Band members and Gordon and Lyn to a property at Cryon. A concert was held at Cryon, while we enjoyed a night out in Lightning Ridge to celebrate Errol’s birthday.

Thursday we went on a tour of an opal mine, before Trevor and Heather went off to do a pre-arranged farm visit. That night we participated in the Lightning Ridge Carols by Candlelight, while the other team participated at Walgett.

Friday Errol and Heather met one property owner in town, while the rest of us split up to visit 3 properties including tours of a working shearing shed, a school room set up for distance education, and a lady discussing all matters spiritual.

Saturday everyone packed up the vans again and met later to camp at Pilliga bore. Our caravan battery was dead so we had to borrow generators and use the car batteries for the next few days. We were able to keep everything working, including Vicki’s CPAP machine (sleep apnea). Saturday night we attended the community gathering and meal at Gwabegar, where both bands were able to again participate. 15 locals committed their lives to Jesus that night following an appeal by Pastor Brian of the Christian City Church in Tamworth. Hallelujah!
Sunday morning following a short worship service we again split up into small groups to visit local property owners. From 4pm onwards, there was a big party at Pilliga bore. A very large crowd enjoyed fairy floss, popcorn, iceblocks, lollies, face painting, jumping castle etc followed by a sausage sizzle. Around 7pm the concert kicked off with the Country Band, Brass Band and a visit from Santa.

Monday, after pulling down the marquees and packing up our own gear we all said our farewells and headed off home. It was a night in Narrabri for us – a chance to unload Bush Mission stuff, then load hamper and Christmas supplies.

15 - 24 December
Tuesday after having a new battery fitted in the van, it was time to head back to Bourke, making one stop in Brewarrina for a birthday visit to our wayward client. Wednesday morning we had to deal with all the paperwork waiting in the PO Box at Bourke and at the store where people leave things for us. Wednesday afternoon we hooked up the van again and travelled to Wanaaring stopping for one pastoral care visit along the way. That night was a chance to catch up with a great many people again and the bonus of having the night at the caravan park donated which meant we could have computers, printers etc plugged in to get client and personal Christmas cards ready. After a couple of early pastoral care visits we headed off towards White Cliffs. The road wasn’t too bad and we had a chance to call in on some clients and arrange to meet another family at the caravan park. Later in the afternoon, leaving the van at the caravan park we travelled further west for a couple more visits. On the return trip we basically had to crawl along because of the severity of the dust storm. Back at the van, it was a case of batten down the hatches and wait it out.

Friday we again travelled west, visiting a property where there had been a tornado since our last visit. Much of their property had been affected – trees down on cars, fences knocked over, electricity cut off when power poles where snapped off at ground level. This was one of the properties that had already been devastated in the September 22nd (and ongoing) dust storms. Our next visit was to the north. On the way there we had a run in with a kamikaze emu, leaving us a bit shaken and some damage to the car. We decided to call in to the Packsaddle hotel for a lunch break to settle ourselves before the afternoon visit. Upon arrival at the next property it was to find that their 9yr old nephew had very recently passed away with leukaemia. Overall this was a particularly draining day, so after the 2 ½hr trip back to the van at White Cliffs, we decided to rest a bit overnight and the following morning. Later in the afternoon, Saturday, we jumped back in the car for the 2hr trip over to Packsaddle for the ‘Christmas Tree’ meal and party. A chance to catch up with the very small handful of people that we already knew, meet many more and to hand out calendars and contact details.

We travelled back to the van at White Cliffs after the party, and then on Sunday morning hooked up again to travel approx 320kms to Hungerford for their Christmas party. On the way we took a different road back through Wanaaring, finding it a lot rougher than the 1st one.
Late in the afternoon we participated in the Church Service at Hungerford, traditionally held before their Christmas party. Dennis (and Sally) Cousins from Frontier Services and Rev John Blair of the Uniting Flying Patrol were leaders for the service. The meal and party was again enjoyable, and a chance to give our contact details to NSW folk. (Hungerford is just on the Qld side of the dingo fence – Qld folk know of their chaplain, Mj Ron McMellon).

Monday, on the way back to Bourke, the rear windscreen was broken by a flying rock. We really didn’t notice the dust coming in until we went to hand out some of the gifts/toys later on in the day. We stopped in at Ford’s Bridge for a couple of quick visits before dropping the van off at our house on the farm. It was then in to Bourke to see the Rural Services Officer at Centrelink. She had tried to organise a couple of interviews for us, because St Vincent De Paul had been taken out of action by a break-in at the end of last week (had to wait for forensics to give the ‘all clear’). These were very needy clients as the one we did see is the mother of a suicide victim and the other was a lady with weight issues who normally doesn’t get out of the house (and still didn’t – we’ll have to visit her in the new year). It was by then 3pm, but we still wanted to get to Louth which is 100kms on dirt road. At Louth we just went from door to door visiting and handing out ‘Christmas Cheer’, as well as visiting one outlying property. We decided we might as well have dinner there before heading back to Bourke, arriving home about 9.30pm.

Tuesday, we loaded up the car with ‘Christmas Cheer’ again and travelled to Byrock for door-to-door and property visits all day on a round trip finishing over on the Cobar Road. Back to Bourke about 4pm, for one more visit before repacking the car and van for the trip home to Narrabri. Lloyd also found some cardboard to cover the back window because we didn’t know when the windscreen would be replaced.

Before leaving town on Wednesday, we finally caught up with a lady whom we had been chasing for days. The staff at the FAMS office (Richmond Fellowship) had her in their office, so we met with her, did what we could and promised to see her early in the New Year (12 yr old daughter having cancer treatments in Sydney).

Back at Narrabri, we unloaded the van and car, and were ready to depart again by lunchtime Thursday. But this time we headed east to spend a few days with our family in Kempsey.

25 – 31 December

Christmas Day, Boxing Day and Sunday was family and friends time. Monday we travelled back to Narrabri, and then Tuesday over to Tamworth to have the new rear windscreen fitted. Wednesday and Thursday, a few days to catch our breath, with some small effort towards writing this report and updating SAMIS etc before we return to Bourke next week.

Well, that is our first year completed as chaplains in Far West North NSW..............................

We have been truly blessed in our travels and feel that people in the outback have embraced our presence with gladness and comfort, knowing that there is an organisation that cares for them holistically.

We are very grateful for the words of encouragement sent to us; otherwise, sometimes there can be a feeling of being out here in the wilderness detached from everyone and everything. We do not know what the New Year will bring, but know that God will be there with us and for us in whatever comes our way. We have started to prepare ourselves (packing etc) for the move to Gunnedah from Narrabri. It means an extra hour trip each way to and from Bourke where we work but there are also some positives.

We continue to commit ourselves to listening to the will of God, and, are ever mindful of the words of our Founder - “Do Something!”

God Bless You Each One, from Lloyd and Vicki
Attachment – Bookmark handed out for BM09 Service 6 December.

My Poem To You
My son, My daughter, My child
I have so much planned for you.
I see you with My mind’s eye
I see your potential, I do!
I created your being
I’m here with you
I know your thoughts
I’ve searched your heart
I’ll help you grow
Meeker, milder, gentler…..

My son, My daughter, My child
I have so much planned for you.
Why won’t you come to Me
I’ll lead and you follow, stay true?
I know the way
I’ll be your guide
Now take My hand
I’ll help you stand
I’ll lift you up
Braver, stronger, wiser…..

My son, My daughter, My child
I have so much planned for you.
My Son, His life I gave
Can’t you see, do you have a clue?
I gave you life
I give you hope
I am the truth
I’ll light your path
Step out in faith
Living, loving, loved…..

My son, My daughter, My child
I have so much planned for you.
Out of My infinite wisdom
My Bible, a poem ‘drawn’ for you!

This bookmark was to go with the message “God’s Love”. The idea for the message came from a drawing given to us by a 4yr old (Emma). She said she had drawn us a ‘poem’ and then went on to say that it was so that we wouldn’t get lost in Bourke, Dubbo, Orange and in the city. As you can see at the top of the bookmark it was a series of lines and dots. I likened this to God drawing a map for us – the Bible – His directions for us so that we won’t get lost (if we follow them). The theme of “God’s Love” was also because He loves us with a childlike love i.e. this little girl accepts and loves us as her friend and cares about what happens to us. Children take us at face value and accept us as their friends, parents, grandparents. Although God knows everything about us He loves us anyway and His greatest desire is that we should believe in Him and love Him in return.

I asked the congregation if they knew that God loved them each one;

He loves us enough to write His Bible - a ‘poem’ for us.

Vicki