

The Social Services of the Church of England in Australia

SCOPE OF SERVICES

Because the Church of England has such a wide range and diversity of services, it will first be necessary to list all those services that would normally be grouped under the Anglican welfare 'umbrella'.

1. Institutional work.

This includes such diverse activities as—
Children's Homes and Family Group Homes;
Homes for the Aged, including flats, hostels
and Retirement Villages;
Hospitals, Infirmaries and Nursing Homes;
Youth Hostels, in conjunction with courts;
Hostels for unmarried mothers;
Half-way houses for ex-prisoners on release;
Homes for the Mentally and Physically
Handicapped Children;
Hostels for country students living in the city.

These institutional services represent the major area of church investment in both manpower and financial resources.

2. Specialised services to particular groups in need.

Immigration — most capital cities contain immigration agencies concerned with welcoming migrants, helping with problems of adjustment and settlement and generally providing information about Australian life.

Marriage Guidance — some capital cities have their own Church of England Marriage Guidance agency dealing with both pre-marital preparation and marital counselling.

Missions to Seamen — most of the major Australian ports have a branch of the Missions to Seamen specifically aimed at providing counselling and recreational opportunities for seamen on shore leave and their families.

3. Work in Rural areas.

This includes the various Aboriginal Mission stations throughout Australia. In many cases the Churches have handed these stations over to government control while still providing a chaplaincy service. In other instances the Church, through its Missionary Societies, continues to run its own Mission stations.

The Bush Church Aid Society provides funds, clergy, nursing sisters and other staff to serve isolated outback areas.

The Church Army works in the country areas as well as in special city situations providing a service which is both of a social and evangelistic nature.

4. Parish Work.

It should always be borne in mind that a vast amount of social work undertaken by the Church is done on a semi-informal level by parish clergy in conjunction with such bodies as Ministers Fraternal and the various social welfare societies

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aimed at meeting particular areas of crisis in local situations. More recently, local churches have taken initiatives with other community groups in the establishment of Citizens' Advice Bureaux and Community Aid Centres. The local parish continues to be a significant means of emergency relief, especially after hours when welfare agencies are closed.

5. Relief work.

In some capital cities, centralised relief agencies do exist for the distribution of clothing, furniture and finance to the needy. An example of this is the Archbishop of Sydney's Winter Appeal which also disburses its funds to its member agencies.

6. Family Welfare Bureaux.

Some individual agencies have developed an approach which focuses upon the total family and which aims usually at providing a casework service with professional social workers.

7. Chaplaincy work.

The Anglican Church in Australia was one of the first churches to appoint chaplains on a full time basis to such institutions as hospitals, mental hospitals, courts, prisons, youth training centres and various aspects of industry. In some cities, hospital chaplains develop specialised ministries in Pastoral and Clinical care and co-operate with other agencies to provide special training for clergy in pastoral counselling methods and techniques. This means the work of these specialised ministries has made considerable impact upon the training of clergy for more specialised counselling roles in a wide range of different situations. The Industrial Chaplains, under the auspices of the Inter-Church Trade and Industry Mission (developed as a result of Anglican initiative) provide a different model to that of the hospitals and mental hospitals. Their work is undertaken in industrial settings being educational and pastoral. Chaplains visiting the various factories seek to provide a counselling service to employees with problems related to their family and their work.

8. Youth work.

Recent approaches have tended to develop specialised educational services with a strong emphasis upon personal development through group projects, conferences and camping experiences.

9. Student work.

In some universities, Anglican chaplains are appointed and in some cases there are also special student hostels for such groups as Asian students.

10. Community Development.

In some of the inner city areas of the larger cities and also in outer suburban housing estates, there have been new developments initiated largely by clergy which are concerned more generally with the development of institutions and services for the whole community. In some instances attempts have been made to foster a sense of local responsibility and leadership, although in many cases the clergy have found themselves in leadership roles due to the general lack of leadership skills in the area.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

In order to understand the welfare services of the Church of England in Australia, it is first necessary to understand the structure of the Church of England itself. Only quite recently did it become a national Church with the result that there are very few national structures developed and even fewer resources available on a national level for such matters as planning and co-ordination. The Church of England in Australia still tends to reflect itself in the work of its 26 partially autonomous Diocese and the various local parishes within them. It is the localised parish and diocesan focus of the Church which has largely dominated the subsequent development of welfare services. Consequently, each Diocese usually has its own quite unrelated services which have developed largely as a result of particular historical circumstances peculiar to that particular region and shaped according to theological pre-suppositions distinctive to the diocese concerned. Where any of the institutions or services listed above are national in structure, they tend to be concerned with their own particular organisational development with insufficient reference to other organisations doing similar work. Thus any planning undertaken is usually of a sectional nature.

Where the organisational structure of services is concerned, each Diocese appears to have developed a different model. In order to illustrate the point, we can take the cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. Sydney Diocese, for example, subsumes its social welfare activities within the framework of Home Missions. Social services are seen as one aspect of the overall missionary task of the Church at home. These are described and listed alongside a wide range of other non-social work activities in a booklet called 'Sydney'scope'. By way of contrast, the Diocese of Melbourne has a Home Mission

Department which does not include social services. In this case one finds a pluralistic model with six or seven separate agencies with their own distinctive identity and with only minimal co-ordination of effort. Perth Diocese, on the other hand, seeks to develop yet a different model which is something of a combination of Sydney and Melbourne. Here, the Archbishop of Perth is in the process of appointing a team of Directors who will be responsible in turn for the work of Overseas Missions, Home Missions, Social Services and Education. They will plan together as a team yet, at the same time, each Director will head up his own department.

With reference to the various agencies mentioned above, their organisational structures differ considerably. In some instances they are run by Boards or Councils appointed through Synod, some are semi-autonomous especially when run by Religious Orders, and others again are completely independent.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

It is frequently very difficult to ascertain in precise terms the goals and objectives of Anglican welfare agencies. They probably differ from secular and community welfare agencies because they place emphasis upon the development of spiritual aspects of life, and in some cases, contain an evangelistic function associated with their work. Generally speaking, most of them would say that their special contribution to social welfare is that they seek to minister to the 'total man' in the sense that they take into account his spiritual, moral, physical, psychological and emotional needs. However, in very few cases has there been any close and detailed scrutiny as to whether they in fact fulfil their objective.

REASON FOR INITIAL DEVELOPMENT

Many of the Children's Homes founded in the 19th century were based upon the concept of rescuing children from tragic or unfortunate circumstances. The notion of service was frequently tied to that of a 'rescue mission' where the child concerned was extracted from its natural environment and placed in a home. In their crusading way, these early welfare endeavours were rather paternalistic and judgmental. The staff in some of them feel that the problems associated with their earlier attitude impede their present work because they are reflected in such things as building design and location. Many old children's homes were large, institutionalised and remote

from population centres and, as such, they are unsuited to current needs and requirements.

In other cases, services were developed in response to earlier government initiative in providing capital and maintenance subsidy. This applies particularly to the Church's involvement in Homes for the Aged. Up to the present there has been a strong emphasis upon building of homes or flat units largely because of the availability of Commonwealth Government subsidies. Church agencies have taken up these subsidies in the sometimes misplaced belief that accommodation for the aged is, in fact, the top priority. It is of some concern that these homes are initially occupied by those who are wealthy enough to make a contribution of up to \$7,000, to the neglect of the poor. In other cases local parishes, or other agency groups, have become involved in building projects because in this way they could experience an immediate and tangible sense of achievement through a building programme. At this point in time there is little indication that the Churches have really stopped and evaluated the effects of their vigorous building programmes for the aged, and little attempt to evaluate the total needs of the aged to see whether there are other methods such as support in the person's home that might be equally appropriate. With a few notable exceptions, in big cities home units have been built with all too little attempt to provide a total service especially designed to meet the changing requirements of care for aged persons particularly as they approach the end of their lives. There is an imbalance between erection of home units for the aged and such things as home nursing services, hostels, frail aged accommodation and hospitals.

Other welfare services have been developed in response to localised pressure to meet an unmet community need. It is not uncommon for a group of local clergy in an outer suburban housing estate to urge centralised welfare agencies to provide a decentralised service or a branch office in that particular area in order to avoid the problems of travelling long distances. In responding to such a request, they have often imposed their traditional methods of work upon a new situation and this has not always been satisfactory.

In some instances, services have been developed around the particular skills that a group of people might have which they wish to make available to the community. For

example, a group of nuns or deaconesses living in a particular local area may have developed a particular pattern of work and a natural bent in undertaking certain tasks. This is frequently a reason for the particular way in which the service has ultimately developed. It may or may not be appropriate to the special needs of the people in that community. Other services have developed as an extension of traditional institutional services in response to changing patterns and needs. For example, most of the old orphanages have sought to develop family group homes so as to de-institutionalise the service. Another example in this respect relates to the development of Family Counselling Centres or Family Welfare Bureaux. These have been developed, usually with professional expertise, because it has been felt that service should not simply be focussed upon the child but rather upon the whole family in a community setting with a strong emphasis upon the prevention of family breakdown.

We can see from the foregoing comments that the initial development of a new service has been based upon very specific criteria and there has usually been very little careful evaluation of goals and objectives, consultation with other bodies and overall joint planning. It is the specific nature of these initial responses which has tended to reinforce the pattern of individualism amongst Anglican welfare agencies which often makes the task of co-ordination and integration of agency work extremely difficult.

STAFFING AND CONTROL

Professional social workers are not employed extensively. Where an agency does employ one it is usually for casework purposes. Seldom are they in positions of decision making or policy making responsibility. The agencies are frequently run by clergy or members of Religious Orders or lay administrators. At the present time there are probably no more than three or four Anglican priests who have been professionally trained as social workers and frequently they are the people directing the agencies. Boards of Management and Councils usually consist of a mixture of clergy and lay business men whose professional competence and training seldom extends to the particular field of social welfare concerned. Where decisions on human lives are involved, dedication and enthusiasm are not enough in the formulation of policies and procedures.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

There is, however, a discernible shift in values in most of the agencies mentioned. In the 19th century they were dominated by paternalistic considerations which have now largely given way to an emphasis upon pastoral care, under the emphasis of more enlightened clergy pastoral training. Most agencies have yet to feel the full impact of professional values at a policy and decision-making level, and in the event of this occurring, further significant change may well take place. In turn, this could produce some conflict in the area of human values. Such need not be the case, however, because this is largely the result of poor communication of their objectives by professionals and the inability of lay people to accept a shift in the balance of power in favour of professionals. Generally speaking, more work needs to be done in sorting out the special roles of professionals, administrators and voluntary workers within a modern agency setting.

Most of the agencies have been strongly 'service' orientated up to the present moment in time. Few of them appear to be aware that, in stopping up gaps in the welfare system, they may be discouraging further initiatives by governments.

However, there are a few encouraging signs that research and social action are also necessary. For example, the Melbourne Social Questions Committee has done work on homosexuality, Sydney Diocese has researched the drug scene and the Brotherhood of St. Laurence specialises in those fields especially related to low income groups.

The appointment of the Social Responsibilities Commission by General Synod is an important advance in this respect. This body seeks to scrutinise more closely public policies and prevailing social attitudes and to make critical comment about these. It also seeks to educate and inform the 'man in the pew' on a wide range of social issues, and finally to encourage political action for change. However, the success of this body, and bodies like it, will be dictated by the degree to which the Anglican Church is prepared to provide the necessary financial resources to produce and distribute social action study documents and to take their recommendations seriously.

Footnote: The author has had difficulty in obtaining full information from all 26 Dioceses. This article has been written on the basis of the 15 replies received to date. He apologises for any obvious omissions or misinterpretations.