

## AFFIRMATIONS

BROTHERHOOD OF ST. LAURENCE  
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BACKGROUND HISTORY OF THE BROTHERHOOD

The Brotherhood commenced in 1930 as an Anglican Religious Order, with Priestly and Lay Brothers living under vows. From the beginning, the Brotherhood functioned with a high degree of independence from the institutional church. The church invited the Brotherhood to undertake the responsibilities of social action and social welfare in a world then full of economic and social hardship. In a sense, the church set the Brotherhood free to undertake those important tasks.

From the earliest days the Religious Order readily shared its goals with others whose motivation might not be labelled as Christian, but who had a deep concern for people. Even in the earliest years, non-Anglicans and non-Christians frequently outnumbered members of the Religious Order. The only test of staff - then and now - was a genuine concern for and a desire to help those in need.

Today the Religious Order no longer exists. The work has rapidly extended into new fields and the organisation of that work has changed almost beyond recognition. However, the original 'core values' of the Brotherhood are still affirmed and expressed through such groups as 'The Companions of St Laurence'. The affirmations which follow are the working out of those core values in relation to the wider society. They are sufficiently broad to encompass the views of Christians and humanists alike.

## I. Affirmations:

These views about people, government and the organisation of society are humanitarian beliefs that would be held by many, or even most, other people. They are expressed because they indicate the general principles on which the Brotherhood's activities and more specific views are based.

1 .. Every person has a right to an equal opportunity to develop as a person to the fullest extent through good quality education, health, housing and social services without regard to their ability to pay.

The principle does not mean that everyone can or should be equal in income, status or job satisfaction or that people have the same goals and values. But it is the basis for working for a much greater equality of opportunity than now exists for large numbers of Australians.

The right to good quality education, health, housing, legal aid and welfare services is necessary for equality of opportunity. 'Without regard to their ability to pay' does not mean that people who can pay or contribute to such services should not do so either directly or through taxation. At present large numbers of people cannot benefit from these services because they are unable to afford them. This is wrong. The extent to which people should pay and how they should contribute must be decided through policy making in politics and within the community. Other matters of policy are tied to increasing or supplementing wages with family allowances or child endowment to bring about a redistribution of income, or through programmes for the disadvantaged by the subsidisation of services.

2. Systems of government and institutions of society must be determined by people's needs and values.

Organisations of all kinds must keep in mind that goods and services for people should be consistent with their purpose, to make sure that the service is for people and not to maintain the organisation itself.

This can happen to welfare agencies as well as to political parties, corporations and self-help groups.

3. a) All people have a right to work and a right to be retrained if they cannot obtain employment. If unable to work they have a right to an income that is adequate in relation to to-day's living standards.

b) If wages are insufficient to maintain adequate living standards, there is a need for the community through the Government to supplement this income, e.g. through Child Endowment.

In a modern, industrial society the provision of work is usually beyond the control of individuals. If they are unable to obtain work, they must not be penalised by greatly reduced living standards. An adequate standard of living should be available for everyone.

This principle raises difficulties such as the effect of raising unemployment benefits closer to an adequate living income. Although it is said that people would not work if unemployment benefits were close to wages, there is evidence that this is not so and that men work for reasons other than wages.

4. Social services are as essential to individual, family and community well-being as other public services such as transport, education and public health utilities, and should be available to all.

The provision of social services should not be dependent on the charitable feelings of a minority of people. Governments must accept responsibility for seeing that social services are available and of a high standard, although they need not necessarily be run by government agencies.

There should be no suggestion that voluntary agencies are meeting, or are capable of providing, unlimited services through their own resources, or even with subsidy. However, government responsibility does not mean that everything must be administered by government bureaucracies. In fact, the government in the carrying out of its responsibilities should direct its efforts towards local and accountable administrations, and aim at encouraging the participation of people in government and voluntary agencies at the local level.

5. People should be encouraged to join in community decision making.

The earlier welfare state idea suggested that the State would provide for an inactive community. It is important that people should be encouraged to be actively interested in politics and the community. In this way people can contribute their own ideas towards society's values and goals.

## II. Current Brotherhood Functions:

The Brotherhood is involved in programmes directed to family, youth, children's and elderly people's welfare. Its central concern is for the poorer, most disadvantaged and rejected among these groups. Their situations are to a large extent created and affected by broader social and economic issues.

To the extent to which these issues affect the people it works with, the Brotherhood tries to make a contribution to knowledge, debate and decision making. This participation is expressed through research and social action which are regarded as essential as the provision of services.

The contribution that seems most appropriate for the Brotherhood depends on an assessment of particular situations, but the following functions are seen to be appropriate, and are often unique functions for non-government agencies. This is how we see our contribution at this time towards realising the affirmations expressed in the first part of this statement.

1. Filling gaps in existing services -

If these gaps are the result of inadequate Government provision of resources or public indifference, then the voluntary organisation must not be content with filling the need for a few people. It has an obligation to help change government or public attitudes and policies and see that the service is available as of right to people who need it.

2. Helping to provide a choice of service -

Most people want to use community provided services and should be helped to do so. However, there is a place for alternative services with different emphases for those who may wish to turn to agencies with different philosophies, such as Church, ethnic organisations or trade unions.

3. Community Education -

Agencies working directly with people should share with their staff and the rest of the community the knowledge they gain and their interpretations of social issues. This means setting aside some resources for communication and education and being available for consultation. It is also necessary to keep staff informed on current issues through circulation of reports and papers written within the Brotherhood.

4. Innovation and Experiment -

This is perhaps the most important role for independent agencies. Government departments are, of course, also involved in new projects, but in areas where needs have not yet been acknowledged by governments or accepted by the public. Independent agencies have a unique opportunity and an obligation to innovate and experiment. They must also be prepared to honestly evaluate their innovating activities.

Independent agencies may have certain freedoms of initiative and expression that are denied to Government agencies, but there are also constraints on independent agencies. The most obvious are the limitations imposed by the attitudes of the controlling members of the agency, lack of funds and fear of the implications for fund-raising of involvement in unpopular programmes or expression of views that are contrary to prevailing community attitudes.

5. Research to evaluate existing services -

Community surveys to discover unmet needs and to evaluate services are appropriate functions for independent agencies, particularly in areas of need where government departments may not be permitted or encouraged to carry out research by politically sensitive governments. Research adds to the general body of knowledge about social issues.

6. Social Action -

This is a systematic attempt to bring about changes in values and priorities. It should be an obligation of independent agencies unless they limit their goals to a purely problem solving role and see their solving function as adapting the client to society. Social action has many facets which include education, research, developing and communicating policies, planning, participating in membership with other agencies and community development.

7. Social 'interpreters' for individuals and families -

Some people find it difficult to make use of Government services because of their lack of knowledge of the opportunities and limits of the service or because government agencies may reject or misunderstand the requests made of them. In these situations independent agencies have a valuable bridging, advocacy or ombudsman role.

8. Community development -

This is a process of mobilising local communities for self-determination and development of their own resources. Self-help organisations and citizen action groups, such as Parents Without Partners, Council for the Single Mother and her Child, The Combined Pensioners' Association, the Carlton Association, the Fitzroy Association, are examples of grass roots community development. Independent agencies and government agencies can assist these processes but they must be careful not to manipulate or unduly influence the policy of the group.

The service must be:-

- a) Geared to involvement - this means that as far as possible administrative responsibility should be shared with consumers of the service and the staff of the agency.
  - this also means that an increased understanding by staff will not only develop the person but will also lead to a better organisation.
- b) Accountable - both to the staff, the public and to the people who use the service, e.g. through Annual Reports and financial statements and evaluation studies of services.
- c) Clear in its stated goals.

- d) Evaluated at regular intervals as to the efficiency and effectiveness in achieving its stated goals through its services; discrepancies can arise between the goals and actual programmes. This involves building in to any programme provisions to facilitate evaluation.
- e) Able to maintain the capacity whereby the agency voluntarily disbands itself or a particular service when it is no longer required or can be provided by other agencies.
- f) Sympathetic and flexible as far as possible within the framework set by the stated goals.
- g) Focussed on the people who use it and not those who provide it.
- h) Honest - demonstrating publicly that it is aware of the limits of both its resources and its skills.
- i) Developmental, remedial and preventive, i.e. through the initiation of new projects, the remedy and prevention of social injustices.
- j) Integrated - at national, regional and local levels. There must be a conscious effort by agencies to be part of the total welfare service.