



**BROTHERHOOD**  
of St LAURENCE

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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## **Some thoughts from Bishop Michael Challen**

**After nine years as Executive Director at the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Bishop Challen retires on Friday 18 June 1999.**

'All good things must come to an end sometime — well, at least for this fifth Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence. My almost nine years have simply flown by. That's because the purpose and work has been so exciting, challenging and worthwhile.'

'I took up the office at a time when international economic forces and national political ideologies had increased the gulf between the rich and poor, the like of which we have not seen since the Great Depression. It has been a tough job maintaining that the bottom line is not money but people; that we are not to be driven by the limits of economics but the vision of the Kingdom of God.'

'However, I have never been alone. The BSL is such a large, strong, vibrant family of 35,000 donors, 1,150 volunteers, 579 staff, delivering quality services and promoting pertinent social policies, arousing the admiration of the people of Victoria and gaining the respect of policy makers.'

While the privilege to lead this most strategic welfare organisation is daunting, the many people I have worked with have made it not merely bearable but immensely satisfying.'

**During his tenure at the Brotherhood, Bishop Challen has seen the organisation confront many national challenges:**

- **Long term unemployment**

'During my time at the Brotherhood long-term unemployment for some has become entrenched. It is a national social and economic disaster that costs governments more than \$10 billion each year.'

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'The parties seem to have lost confidence in their ability to make a marked difference to levels of unemployment. We have yet to hear any detailed and coherent strategies, the really positive approaches to generate jobs that Australians need and want.'

- **Families in poverty**

'Australians should be shocked to learn that there are more than 700,000 children growing up in poverty in this country - and the numbers would have been worse if recent governments had not intervened to support families on low incomes.'

**Bishop Michael has seen many innovative projects initiated by the Brotherhood of St Laurence:**

- The Home Instruction Program for Preschool Children (HIPPY) which aims to improve the educational success of children growing up in disadvantaged circumstances.
- Frankston Furniture Works which provides work experience and training for previously long-term unemployed people.
- The establishment of St Laurence Community Services (Barwon) Inc.
- The Transition project which improves the path to employment for students who choose to leave school before completing Year 12.
- The *Future of Work* project by the Social Action and Research Directorate which examined the changes which are re-shaping work in Australia.
- The opening in 1997 of the Craigieburn and Roxburgh Park Family and Community Centre offering a range of family services to one of Victoria's fastest growing regions that suffers from limited infrastructure.

**Bishop Challen has strong views on:**

- The importance of education and the value of early intervention programs
- The building and strengthening of communities
- The right for people to have access to affordable housing
- Recognition of indigenous people
- The bottom line is people not money.

**Profile of Bishop Michael Challen**

Michael Challen has been the Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence since 1991. A graduate in Science and Theology, he was ordained in 1957 and has pursued a variety of ministries in Melbourne and Perth. These have had a special focus on low income and marginalised people together with their communities ranging from inner suburban to new housing estates, from Anglo-Saxon to Aboriginal people.

He was the Director of the Anglican Inner City Ministry from 1961-71 when inner Melbourne was undergoing profound sociological change.

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In Perth, he was responsible for the future planning, establishment and support of the Church as the city burgeoned, establishing up to four new parishes each year.

He has served on a variety of strategic committees of the Church at a diocesan and national level.

Similarly he has chaired a variety of government committees, most notably the Social Security Advisory Council.

He has a continuing interest in enabling the Church to give effective expression within contemporary life to the social justice outworkings of the Christian Gospel.

He was consecrated a bishop in 1978 to assist the Archbishop of Perth.

He is married to Judy and they have two daughters (35 and 32) back in Perth.

Together, they have an active interest in music, theatre, walking, tennis and architecture. Michael does like to get to the carpenter's bench too.

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The Brotherhood St Laurence is an independent, Melbourne-based organisation that works for the well-being of low-income and other disadvantaged members of the Australian community, to improve their economic, social and personal circumstances. The Brotherhood provides a wide range of community and welfare services and direct assistance to low-income people. In addition it tackles the causes of poverty by undertaking research, community education and the lobbying of governments for a better deal for low income people.

## **Further information**

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