

BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

TO THE 29TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 21ST NOVEMBER, 2000

In trying to summarise events of the past year a number of phrases come to mind. Was it a year of settling down - of consolidation? It has seen Nic Frances settling in, and making his mark as the new Executive Director. It has also seen the fruits of our "*Building Better Lives Appeal*" put to work both in the renovation of our aged care buildings, Sumner and Millott Houses, and also in the provision of new welfare services.

But settling down, or consolidation, fails totally to describe the departure of a number of senior staff members including Alison McClelland who left us after some ten years to take an associate professorship at LaTrobe University, Leslie Dredge who as I say in my Chairman's Report found the lure of newborn twins overwhelming, and also John Forster who was acting director Community Services, and Michael Perusco, the director of our Finance and Administration. Our most recent departure has been that of Natalie Savin who has been filling in as our leader of Community Services. I know that Nic Frances will say more about the changes in personnel which have occurred in the past year.

Furthering this atmosphere of change has also been the major revamp which is now taking place in the way we conduct our Donated Goods business. Again, we have also seen the purchase of a new business, Mod-Style, a spectacle frame distributor which we are confident will give us a further source of funds to develop our mission and core business, the empowerment of people who have little money or other resources so they are able to help themselves, and to build better lives.

The truth is that the very nature of the Brotherhood of St Laurence makes it extremely difficult to sum up the Brotherhood year in a few words. Perhaps it is true enough to say it was a normal year, full of progress and development, with some frustrations, setbacks, and surprises.

What we have had confirmed this year, over and over again, is the dedication, and the commitment, to the Brotherhood shown by the staff, at every level. Inevitably, and understandably given the type of organisation we are, some staff have been critical of the way things are done, but in every case, it is their love for, and dedication to, the Brotherhood which has motivated them to speak out, and to discuss their concerns.

It is also very correct that, at this stage, I put on record the performance of the Board of the Brotherhood which has had considerable demands placed on its time and expertise over the past year, and has met every challenge with understanding, and great enthusiasm.

These words of commendation bring to mind one of the more memorable speeches made by my university football coach which contained the lines as he rose to inspire the troops "I want four things from youse boys: I want dedication, concentration, application and I can't remember the fourth" he said "but I know it ended in shun". The staff, the executive, the volunteers and the Board have all shown those four forms of "shun", in spades, this year.

A study of the Brotherhood's financial statements will show that this year we made an operating deficit of \$350,000, which compares to an operating surplus of around about the same amount last year. While a deficit may be seen as disappointing, it is important that we understand why it has occurred, the area most at fault being Donated Goods whose performance this year fell well behind budget. Steps are already in train to correct this situation. Our Director of Finance, Ian McHutchison will be commenting in more detail on our financial performance later in the meeting.

While talking about our finances I should also draw your attention to the Brotherhood's Annual Report for 2000 which I believe gives a first class account of the Brotherhood's activities, mission and aims, as well as the necessary corporate governance statements, and the all important thank you to our supporters who again this year have been truly magnificent in the many many ways they have given to the Brotherhood.

However the Annual Report does contain one howler, and it is on page 17 in the caption that accompanies the photo taken at the dedication of Sidney Myer House. Lady Southey is described as Ms Marigold Southey. When I rang Marigold to apologise she laughed saying that she had been called many things in her time but after some hesitation she said "I don't think I've been called Ms Marigold for some time". She refused to countenance a sticker being made to correct this unfortunate mistake but we do most definitely apologise to you Lady Southey.

One person who deserves very special treatment this evening is our retiring Deputy Chairman Dr Concetta Benn, known to all and sundry as Connie. Connie has been involved with the Brotherhood for twenty years, first as a staff member, then a Director, and more recently as Deputy Chairman of the Board. Connie's experience as a researcher, in developing the family care centre, and as Director Research, Social Policy and Innovation, together with her wise counsel always freely given, have made her the most valuable of Board members, and I know the Board and for that matter the Brotherhood as a whole will miss her greatly. I remember on one occasion when Connie and I, as Chairman and Deputy Chairman, were discussing a particularly thorny problem if I remember rightly in the social welfare area, and in frustration I said "Connie I just don't understand this welfare business". Quick as a flash Connie replied "and you never will, but keep going dear, there are others that do". Connie thank you also for the great help you have been to me.

As many of you know, one of my hobby horses while at the Brotherhood has been the education of our children and in particular the need to ensure our disadvantaged children are given the chance each deserves to realise his or her potential. As I say in my Chairman's Report in the Annual Report, this year I attended a Cranlana Symposium "Dilemmas in Competitiveness, Citizenship and Community" where time and again the debate centred on the need to look after and develop our most valuable resource, our people, and in particular the obligation Australia has to educate its children. It was with some pride that I was able to speak, at that Symposium, of the success of our HIPPY, Homework and Transition programs.

The so called HIPPY program for pre-school youngsters tries to ensure that children from disadvantaged homes hit the ground running when they first go to school, the program having instilled, in those children, both a love and acceptance of what school has to offer, and also a confidence in parents to assist those children when they do start school.

The Transition program attempts to provide support to young people who may leave school early, providing a case worker at the school to develop personal relationships with teenagers to link them into further training or employment before, as is so often the case, they fall out of the system. It is relevant here to note that, while in 1992, 77% of school children went on to Year 12, in 1999 that figure had fallen to 72%, in the government sector the figure was lower at 66% and among indigenous children it was as low as 33%.

Australia is one of the few OECD countries with a declining percentage of total school children remaining at school until Year 12. Research has also shown that by the age of 24, the incidence of unemployment among early school leavers is twice that of children who stay until Year 12. I believe these figures are unacceptable and, although the work the Brotherhood is doing may be seen as attacking only the tip of the iceberg, our efforts may seed further work in this area, and hopefully will be taken up in time by both State and Federal Governments.

An Australia free from poverty may seem an unrealistic goal to some but it is not to the Brotherhood, nor should it be to any caring Australian, although I must admit from time to time we all have our doubts. However, we are certain that programs like HIPPY, Transitions, and also our Homework program, are practical ways from which our otherwise disadvantaged children can benefit enormously thereby ensuring they do not fall into the poverty trap.

Another aim of many of us at the Brotherhood, over the last few years, has been to encourage younger people to have an involvement with the organisation. It was one of the reasons, among many, we employed the youthful, and enthusiastic, Nic Frances to be our new Executive Director. And we believe its working.

The “*Building Better Lives Appeal*”, has certainly involved an active participation from many younger people as we have sought to, and successfully, raised over \$6 million. Nic’s appeal to the young was also in evidence a few weekends ago when he was guest speaker at the Geelong Grammar School speech day. With a roving microphone, Nic first moved among the boys seated in the hall, and then, rather more dangerously I think, moved among the parents. Afterwards there was a line of parents and boys wanting to shake Nic’s hand and talk with him. John McInnes, Chairman of the Geelong Grammar Council, and known to many of you as a one time Board member, and past Chairman of the Brotherhood’s Finance Committee, said that after speech day he basked in reflected glory, the general consensus being that Nic had totally engaged with his audience. They were inspired.

It is interesting that connections have existed between Geelong Grammar and the Brotherhood of St Laurence since the Brotherhood’s inception in 1930. The Brotherhood’s founder the Reverend Gerard Kennedy Tucker was not averse to asking those he considered able to help, for assistance. For Example, from the foundation of St Laurence Park at Lara in the late 1950s, Geelong Grammar boys were helping with the care and maintenance of the grounds, and indeed the building of one or more of the cottages. In 1984 Sir James Darling, the doyen of Geelong Grammar headmasters, gave the sermon at the service to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of St Laurence Park and also the Geelong Donated Goods division. In a wide ranging talk, Sir James, *inter alia*, had this to say. “Of all the many great services that Father Tucker gave to this State and Nation, perhaps this was his greatest, that he had the gift and the power to draw others in to work with him and for him and his often seemingly preposterous plans.”

Sir James continued, “One hears a lot these days about how shocking it is for people to be exploited. Teachers, even doctors and nurses and social workers, are concerned about their rights and their rewards. They seem to have lost sight of the privilege of being used. The greatest tragedy for the unemployed is not poverty, though, God knows, that is bad, but the feeling that they are not needed, that they cannot be used.

It is a wonderful privilege and an honour to be thought by Tucker as worth something and to be used by him; and, as he was so often right in what he wanted done, it was an extra bonus to share in the success of his enterprises.”

Inspiring words from Sir James, himself a great educator.

Finally, may I say what a privilege it has been to have played a small part in the mission, and the activities of such a vibrant and respected organisation as the Brotherhood, over the past twelve years, and for the last three as Chairman of the Brotherhood’s Board. I would like to thank all those, including my fellow Board members, the Brotherhood’s senior executive, and for that matter all at the Brotherhood who have given me such tremendous loyal, and sometimes critical, support and guidance over the past years. If you give my successor as Chairman Stephen Duckett the same level of support he can ask for no more, and will be totally satisfied.

Thank you.

C. G. Clark