

**Brotherhood of St Laurence
Annual General Meeting
14 November 1995**

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
The Right Reverend Michael B Challen**

The President of the Brotherhood of St Laurence,

The Most Reverend Keith Rayner, Archbishop of Melbourne and Mrs
Rayner,

the Chairman of the Board,

The Right Reverend Oliver Heyward and Mrs Heyward,

Members of the Board,

Charter Members and Life Members of the Brotherhood of St Laurence,
staff of the Brotherhood of St Laurence,

Companions and supporters of the Brotherhood of St Laurence,

Friends all:

In 1994 our theme was assessment and review. Arising from that
assessment and review comes this year's themes - the three Cs -
challenges, consolidation and creation.

In a sense all of these merge into one another. The end result of their
achievement will be an organisation that is more focused, more innovative,
more imaginative, and more vital.

However, we are under no illusion that this can be achieved without hard work, dedication, and a resoluteness of spirit. I believe that the staff at the Brotherhood of St Laurence have all three of these attributes.

Firstly, let me briefly describe our challenges.

Challenges come in many guises. We must address our financial situation. We must reorient and position ourselves in relation to the very real material and social needs of today's society and in relation to other welfare agencies. And we must work cooperatively and effectively with government and other agencies to meet our objectives.

Addressing our financial situation in part merges with our need to reposition ourselves. We have already achieved significant savings for this financial year - and financial stringency will be a 'fact of life' in our organisation.

The staff of the Brotherhood have responded to the need for cost-cutting even though it has meant greater pressure being placed upon them. I take this opportunity to both acknowledge that effort and thank them for it.

Arising from the review, *Directions 2000*, we are also in the process of becoming a smaller organisation. Some divestments have occurred and others are in train. The income derived from these divestments will, of course, assist in creating a healthier financial situation.

Actual divestments and those being seriously pursued at this stage include Carinya Nursing Homes being placed with the Anglican Homes who are specialists in the area.

We are planning to create a new community-based Geelong organisation with links to the Brotherhood out of the present Barwon Region.

In our Central Highlands region (ie, Ballarat area), a task force is working with the local people for the divestment of most of the services. Some links will be maintained through the Prevention of Youth Homelessness Project, and the Provincial Community Enterprises service over the next three years.

What makes the Brotherhood distinctive is that it assists people on low incomes through three approaches.

Its services provide people with what they need immediately - for example, with material aid and no interest loan schemes.

Then it has projects that work on prevention - such as the Prevention of Youth Homelessness Project, and the Family Friend and Homework programs.

Finally it has projects that inform the community about the structural reasons for poverty, with constructive and innovative ideas about what can be done - such as the Future of Work project.

The Brotherhood must also work cooperatively with government and other agencies in order to meet our objectives.

Since our commitment is to people on low incomes, this almost inevitably requires us to be critical of government policies (Federal, State or Local) that may affect this group detrimentally.

However, it does also mean that we must respond to a new competitive relationship within society which will require us to sharpen our thinking about quality service delivery and management.

It was encouraging to find that the Industry Commission's Inquiry into Charitable Organisations in 1994 resulted in a report that acknowledged the extensive and valuable contribution of the non-government sector in providing services to the Australian community.

We have welcomed this report, but have argued that the welfare sector must be involved in and have some say in the fashioning of the guidelines and intended outcomes of the tendering process as well as the general planning of services.

These are the types of challenges that we are facing and that we are dealing with. The steps taken during the last financial year to implement *Directions 2000* can be found listed on page 9 of the Annual Report.

I will not go through these in detail, except to say that the appointment of our new Deputy Director - Operations, Ken Swanson, has meant that our strategic planning process has begun in earnest.

Goals and strategic objectives have been agreed upon, and planning based on these is now in process. The strategic planning process is undergirded

by an appropriate financial plan to address the structural deficit, making the plan both feasible and possible

In the light of the challenges mentioned above, it is important and relevant that I should list these goals for you now because these signify both our consolidation and creation phases.

Goal 1 is: To give priority through services, research and social action to those areas which are likely to be most significant as either a cause or effect of poverty over the next three years.

Goal 2 is: To achieve a sustainable operational budget, with an appropriate level of reserves to meet the demands and responsibilities of the BSL Charter.

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Goal 3 is: To make a substantial improvement in the capacity and performance of BSL management to identify and achieve organisational objectives.

Goal 4 is: To develop further the BSL's capacity to exercise strategic influence for positive social change.

Goal 5 is: To improve the quality of all activities throughout the BSL.

And **Goal 6** is: To improve both the BSL's external focus in order to maximise influence, support and opportunities, and the communication and relationships within the BSL (including service users, staff and volunteers).

This financial year will see us working towards achieving these objectives - creating and focusing the Brotherhood of the future - and capitalising on these strengthened relationships.

1996 is the first year of the UN decade for the eradication of poverty. It is therefore fitting that we approach challenges of the future in this spirit.

The eradication of poverty is the commitment we all share and one that will keep the organisation motivated, focused and forward-looking.

I have no doubt that the stages of reflection, review, consolidation and action embarked upon over these two years 1995-1996 will result in greater effectiveness and a stronger and more focused voice.

In conclusion, while the organisational demands and needs of the Brotherhood must adapt to changing needs, environments, and efficiencies, the voice of the Brotherhood of St Laurence remains, and must remain, clear and strong.

Its founder, Father Gerard Tucker, back in the 1930s, lived and worked amidst slums and stark reminders of depression-caused poverty not so obvious today. For us, the need is just as great, but its consequences are not so obvious to the eye.

In today's more complex world, we face more subtle obstacles to eradicate poverty. These include the global flow of capital, the generation and distribution of work and thus income.

A most prominent obstacle is the unquestioned belief and propagation of competitive individualism - a belief that places the self-interest of the individual above all else. A world devoid of any 'social contract' was described by the philosopher Thomas Hobbes as one of perpetual war:

'every man against every man...' and '...the life of man [as being] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short' [*Leviathan* 1651).

In contrast to this unacceptable and impoverished outlook is Jesus' simple, inclusive and expanding command:

'Love God ... and love your neighbour as yourself'.

The Christian revelation acknowledges the factor of self-interest. But transforms it. It places our own self in a context in which we experience being vitally connected with one another and fulfilled through both our common humanity and also through our common divinity.

It is imperative that the social, economic and political structures of our society enhances this connectedness, especially for the poor.

During 1996 there will be elections for Federal Parliament, State Parliament and some Local Councils. All of us have the duty to vote. For, those people who share the values of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the critical questions to ask of all those standing for office are - Does this policy of yours consolidate or divide our community, and How does it affect the poor?

True to its highly regarded tradition, the actions of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, are based on the belief that interdependence is the reality, and a sense of responsibility for each other the key to a better society.

Consequently, we will both promote and support those policies and practices, in all spheres of social life, which uphold and foster our connection with each other and our mutual responsibility for society as a whole.

These questions must be asked particularly in a period of substantive change to our public services. Only by employing and fostering beliefs and practices that demonstrate our interdependence can we hope to achieve a better society for all.

The people of the Brotherhood of St Laurence will be working for this in the coming year.