

REVIEW: *Directions 2000*

Positive social change:

- > *requires critical appraisal and flexibility*
- > *focuses on relevant issues*
- > *responds to changing needs*

It is imperative for any organisation to constantly re-examine itself in order that it retains its original mission and sense of purpose. This is made all the more important in a context of rapid social, economic and technological change. The Board of the Brotherhood of St Laurence recognised that the way ahead was to adapt to changing external circumstances while holding on to its core values. In this spirit, it took the initiative to assess its organisation by commissioning a review by external consultants.

The review, *Directions 2000*, was established to:

- clarify the strategic directions of the Brotherhood of St Laurence;
- develop a strategic plan for the direction of the Brotherhood;
- assess the structural, financial, and management arrangements, and
- develop recommendations for improvements in efficiency and effectiveness.

The Board of the Brotherhood of St Laurence adopted recommendations arising from this review in December 1994.

Directions 2000 has provided three frameworks under which the organisation will operate. The first outlines what the organisation is and what it stands for; the second sets out the criteria against which it will decide what it will and won't do; and the third sets out the decision criteria for service participation (see *Appendix* for full text).

The first is the *Operating Charter* which defines the organisation. The charter states that the Brotherhood of St Laurence is founded on the Anglican tradition, encouraging the involvement of all people who support its mission. Other key elements are that the Brotherhood of St Laurence:

- is a Melbourne-based organisation that has a wider regional and national impact;
- works with, and for, the well-being and empowerment of people who are poor;
- advocates positive social change based on policy and research drawn on its experience of directly providing services for some of the most neglected and needy people in our community;
- is an autonomous organisation, which is committed to continuing as an independent voice for people in our community who are poor.

The charter also proposes that 'As a champion of positive social change, the Brotherhood will itself change in response to wider changes in the community and the emergence of new areas of need'. This proposition reflects the need for constant review and innovation to ensure that real needs in the community are met as they arise.

The second, *Guiding principles for service involvement*, provides the general framework for decision-making. An important principle of operation is that its activities are 'founded on the principle of empowering the people it seeks to serve'. Others are that the Brotherhood:

- will support and assist local communities to develop initiatives in new areas through empowering and seeding new ventures, but will try to avoid permanent colonisation;
- will not aspire to be simply the biggest service provider in any particular area of activity;
- will seek to ensure diversity of funding in order to secure its independence.

The third, *Decision criteria for service participation*, focuses more specifically on whether

'The Brotherhood's commitment to working for positive social change will remain unaltered and will continue to provide the foundation on which our achievements, reputation, and compassion are built.'

*Bishop Michael Challen,
December 1994*

involvement is warranted. The case for involvement must occur only if there is a distinct case for Brotherhood involvement, such as where:

- there is an identified need;
- programs can be designated to produce positive change;
- it represents the best use of limited resources;
- reliance on government funding does not impose undue constraints.

The review clearly focuses the role of the Brotherhood of St Laurence and links it firmly within its tradition of positive social change through both its social policy and research and also its innovative services.

Recommended structural changes included the setting up of a new Executive Council as the executive group responsible to the Board. Among others, their responsibilities were to focus on ensuring that:

- strategies, policies and programs are implemented according to the charter and criteria;
- streamlining the functional elements into operations, social justice and finance; and
- implementing a simple and comprehensive structure of reporting.

In the period from December 1994 to June 1995, the following implementation processes and decisions relating to *Directions 2000* occurred:

- an *Implementation Committee* was formed consisting of three members of the Board (Concetta Benn, Sandy Clark and Elizabeth Loftus), the Executive Director and a staff member, to proceed with implementing the review's recommendations;
- two former Directors were appointed as *Deputy Directors* (Bruce Ellis, Deputy Director - Finance, and Alison McClelland, Deputy Director - Social Action and Research) and consequently became members of the Implementation Committee;
- the Executive Director met with all staff to convey the Board decisions and set in motion a process that enabled all staff to be informed and able to comment on these recommendations;
- all Directorates developed proposals in response to implications arising from *Directions 2000* and presented these to the Implementation Committee;
- three task forces were set up to investigate divesting services in accordance with *Directions 2000*;
- the position of *Deputy Director - Operations* was advertised nationally (Ken Swanson appointed in late June and commenced in July 1995);
- the Executive Council was established consisting of the Executive Director and the three Deputy Directors - Finance, Social Action and Research, and Operations;
- the Public Affairs Department was relocated to Social Action and Research (formerly Social Policy and Research).

At the end of the 1994-95 financial year, phase one of the implementation of *Directions 2000* was completed. The Implementation Committee handed over their role to the Executive Council to focus on the strategic management framework and strategic plan.



A group of new staff and volunteers get to know the Brotherhood on one of its regular orientation days.