

THE BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE
ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

17th NOVEMBER, 1992

REPORT FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

INTRODUCTION

Archbishop, Members of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, staff and friends, my purpose in this statement is not so much to look back over the year. This need is adequately met by our official Annual Report. Rather I wish to highlight some initiatives which will be developed during 1992-1993 in service to the community or for improving the wellbeing of the organization as such.

1. THE STANCE AND SCALE OF THE ORGANIZATION

- 1.1 The policy of Government contracting out services to "for-profit" or "non-profit" organizations, sometimes known as "privatization", is likely to be extended during the next year. The Directors have prepared a position paper for the Board to consider at its December meeting. This policy raises two basic issues for us. Firstly, the social justice issue of affordable services of quality being available to all throughout Victoria. Secondly, the strategic issue of the BSL maintaining a positive yet independent position with respect to the Governments so that it can effectively maintain its public critique of social policies, programmes and practices. In addition, there is an assumption amongst many people in the community that the BSL may be like other welfare organizations and readily accept the opportunities to expand by privatization.
- 1.2 The BSL mission statement (see Annual Report page 1) and its consequential goals adopted this year provides both a stance and criteria whereby the Board and Directors may evaluate such Government proposals.
- 1.3 In September, the Board officially established the Central Highlands Region centred on Ballarat. It is quite apparent already that our collective understanding of the social implications of the current unsatisfactory economic situation and Government policies have been expanded and enriched by this direct involvement with people in need within both the Barwon and Central Highlands Regions. The Board sees no need to establish any more regions.

In the case of Central Highlands, a plan of working with the Anglican Diocese of Ballarat has been adopted whereby the BSL and the Diocese will work in a complementary way with one another.

2. THE LIFE OF THE ORGANIZATION

- 2.1 During the year, a program called "performance development" was instituted. Its purpose is to enable each member of staff in whatever activity to clearly understand his/her responsibilities; to review these in the light of actual events; to provide informal and more formal opportunities to develop further the relevant skills required; to increase personal satisfaction; to improve the quality of performance and to foster possible career development. My goal is to ensure this programme is regarded as a positive programme by each member of staff.
- 2.2 The changes in the State's industrial legislation makes all of this more pertinent. The challenge will be to ensure our public pursuit of justice is reflected within our internal relationships, wages and working conditions and by the affirmation of every member of staff.
- 2.3 The Brotherhood has been singularly well supported by volunteers ever since its foundation (see page 22 of the Annual Report). The recession has released considerably gifted people to offer their services too. It could be that as more people move into part-time or casual work, voluntary community service will become even more significant for new categories of people. Through a model program based in the Peninsula, the BSL is exploring the enlistment, training, deployment and nurture of volunteers.
- 2.4 Our staff do work with enthusiasm, competence and application. The pressures are not likely to be less over the next years. I am encouraging them to participate in so called days of "rest and recreation" (organized by the Chaplain) which give them the time and a setting within which they can reflect upon what is happening to them and be in touch with what gives them the purpose and energy to be in this ceaseless work.
- 2.5 During 1993, myself and my fellow directors will be giving more attention to the affirmation and care of our so valuable staff.

3. INITIATIVES IN SOCIETY

- 3.1 In our Annual Report of 1991, I expressed my concern about the possibility that unemployment levels will remain at unacceptably high levels for some time. Since then, public statements have been made not

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only by political leaders but also independent economists supporting my concern. The Board has now sponsored, as a priority, a two to three year project called the Future of Work which will examine the feasibility of our long standing commitment to the goal of full employment within a reorganized economy; changes in the patterns of work; the impact of these changes upon vulnerable people and finally the interaction between wages and income supplement and taxation. The project not only intends to produce well considered and substantiated realistic policies but also a conversation on these matters amongst ordinary people. We all have a need and a right to know what economic-social situation Australia is moving towards.

3.2 A second major project is that of the Prevention of Youth Homelessness. This has its origins in the disturbing discoveries of the Burdekin Inquiry (1989) and our own involvement with homeless job-seekers. This will be an action-research program over 5 years which will work amongst 40 families with adolescents at risk and will involve the young adult, the family, the school and relevant community services. It is expected that the basic needs of accommodation, income and education/training will inescapably have to be addressed. It is expected that this process will uncover fundamental and thus common principles of response which could be shared across the nation. Several major Trusts together with the State Government are assisting with its costs.

3.3 The present economic and social and political turmoil is clearly causing on the one hand people to defend their interests and on the other hand a re-consideration of societal values and goals. At the recent Roman Catholics' seminar on their Bishops' statement "Common Wealth for the Common Good" a suggestion was made for all people of goodwill to get together to promote at this critical time of restructuring, the basic notion of the economy serving individuals and the community as such.

Throughout our 62 years of service and social action, the BSL has worked hard for such an understanding. As we celebrate our 60 years in Fitzroy and Victoria, I am quite convinced that the BSL once again needs to join with others to publicly and vigorously encourage our citizens to re-assert the primacy of people over money. This is too big a subject to be dealt with here and now. However, I bring it to your attention, seeking registrations of interest so that the idea may be explored and if

judged to be appropriate, then implemented. I believe that the "Companions of St Laurence" needs to be so organized and developed so that each member and cell become catalysts and co-workers of a movement for an inclusive, compassionate and just Australia within this time of substantial change.

+MICHAEL B CHALLEN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Prepared 15 November, 1992