

Brotherhood of St Laurence
ANNUAL MEETING 1993
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The President of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Most Reverend Keith Rayner

The Chairman of the Board, the Venerable Andrew Curnow

Members of the Board

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,

1993 marks the sixtieth year the Brotherhood of St Laurence has been working with and for the advancement of the wellbeing of disadvantaged people, families and communities in Melbourne. The year had its times of celebration, the most notable being June 18th which was the precise 60th anniversary of the brothers commencing their work. Those of you who were able to be present will recall what a happy and positive day that was when the Governor-General unveiled the special commemorative plaque of Fr Tucker and we had that marvellous procession through the streets of Fitzroy culminating in a splendid Eucharist.

But the year has brought pressure upon people seeking our services and staff alike - 24% increase in the numbers (36,000) requiring material and emergency relief, over 3,000 unemployed people assisted with job training. Staff have had to respond with less resources available to them. The welfare sector in this State has looked for increased support and leadership from the BSL as the Government's policies concerning maternal and child health, residential services, education and health, have had their negative impact. Opportunities have emerged to either establish or strengthen our connections with business, unions and the religious communities.

The substantial loss incurred by our Donated Goods Division and the general reduction in income from our various shops have not only reminded all staff that the BSL itself is caught up in this recession but have caused stress and instability throughout the whole organisation.

Notwithstanding all this pressure, the aged are still cared for, homeless young people are brought back into the mainstream of life, hundreds of unemployed people regain the dignity and satisfaction that comes from work, social policies are scrutinized and revised as need be, politicians of all persuasions meet with us, advocacy continues both in public and private and money is found to undergird it all!

Of all our activities may I bring your attention to the following:-

1. The Fundraising Department raised the record amount of \$2,891,454 (gross), excluding legacies. (Net result - \$2,036,081)
2. A new video about our purpose and work was made.
3. The corporate sector of Melbourne was approached for the first time in order to fund the three year Future of Work programme - \$1.0m.
4. The small hospital associated with the Tucker Settlement was closed as it had been made superfluous by alternative facilities in the region which can provide modern, sophisticated services.
5. The Prevention of Youth Homelessness Project is now on the ground in Ballarat and Dandenong.
6. The BSL through the Barwon Region is making a substantial input into the shaping of policies for the rejuvenation of the Geelong economy.
7. The BSL has been well to the fore through its submission to the Prime Minister's special Committee on Employment Opportunities. Its "Green Paper" is about to be released.
8. The redesigned Companions of St Laurence has formed five cells in different parts of Melbourne focussed on different expressions of engagement with the community.
9. The review of Aged Services will be completed in June 1994.
10. The review of the Donated Goods Division will be completed by February 1994.

TUNNEL ANALYSIS OR SOCIAL SYMPHONY

Relative to what is possible for our nation these days, Australia is experiencing the most straitened circumstances ever - 11% unemployed, 36% of youth without work, 500,000 families without a breadwinner; the gulf between those on high incomes and low incomes increasing with the middle income group shrinking and an increasing proportion of people, including men, being in casual or part-time work; both Federal and State Governments operating with huge deficits.

In truth, many people have become tired of this oft repeated litany of social and economic woes probably because it is too difficult for them to understand and they feel so impotent about making any positive response - which attitudes are easy to appreciate.

However, there are others who make the problems manageable by concentrating upon one or other of the two poles which are usually called "the social" and "the economic". Welfare people are painted as impossibly idealistic and economically unrealistic. Business people are regarded as ruthlessly pragmatic and socially irresponsible. However, it is my experience these days that such absolute dichotomies are rarely to be found in enlightened people. But they may be found in their organisations and their undergirding philosophies respectively.

The modern facility for acquiring information arises from the power of focussed analytical thought which is reinforced by electronic brains. The price of such a process is the inadequate and thus invalid restricting of factors to be considered in that analysis with the consequence of deductions being made which do not emerge from the world in all its complexity but from some lesser but more convenient picture. This is particularly true of our analysis of the human being and human communities.

This pressure to reduce our picture of the world is all the greater when the matter of resources in the form of money or economic goals is brought into consideration. At this time we Victorians are being urged by our Premier to wait until 2001 A.D. when the State debt will have been reduced to manageable proportions and then the Government can address its responsibilities to provide adequate services in housing, health, education and community services.

Such an outlook completely ignores the displacement of persons and families from our society in the meantime and the deterioration in both the adequacy and quality of those essential services.

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On the other hand, community services cost money. Welfare costs money. More significantly, the most satisfactory way for distributing the nation's wealth and all that such wealth makes possible to our citizens is through income. There is little point in urging our governments to deliver essential services if the community, through its collective effort, is not generating sufficient wealth. So those of us who hold up social ideals must reckon with the realities of enlarging our economy.

It is so important that we are not overtaken by the force, but limitations, of our own way of thinking. We must not be contained by our tunnel-like analysis granted its potency. This applies to ecclesiastical leaders too.

Rather we need to bring our various ways of thinking together in a way the themes of a symphony produce with all their diversity an integrated and acceptable whole.

Historically, the BSL has held the social and the economic together. We know this reality internally as we evolve our annual budget and through the effort put into generating our independent income. We know this reality externally as year by year we make submissions to the Federal Government's Budget, not so much with respect to community services but rather in terms of economic policy, taxation and social security.

However, in all these considerations we can so easily overlook the real issue. The fundamental concern is not so much income or the provision of a particular service as such. The real issue is that so called intangible idea but powerful trigger we call justice. The plea of all people surely is not so much "Let's have more." Rather, the plea is for a "fair go", or a "real place" in our society.

At this time of economic constraints, reduction in government spending, chronic high unemployment, people are asking what are we on about. There is something obscene about people spending more than \$2M on a house while 25,000 or more young people are without shelter. There is something obscene about those with means being able to use prolonged litigation to avoid their corporate responsibilities, whereas a lone mother who has committed a Social Security offence is imprisoned. What we all are looking for and what was so clear at the Victorian Community Summit is the goal of social justice and social inclusion, not social deprivation nor social exclusion.

A sign of intelligence, I am told, is the ability not to analyse but to make connections. We of the BSL have the task of helping people to think beyond their own frameworks and preference and make connections with other relevant understandings. Thereby we can promote a social symphony.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this report I, on your behalf, wish to place on record our appreciation of the respective contributions of various Board members who are retiring from their position at this meeting, namely:-

John McInnes (15 years)
Board member February 1988
Finance Committee February 1978 to February 1988
(including Chair from 1985 - 1988)
Fundraising Development Committee 1992

Andrew Ferry (10 years)
Board November 1988
Finance Committee July 1983 to October 1993
(including Chair from February 1988 to July 1993)
St Laurence Industries Board from inception until July 1993
(Continues as a member of the Central Highlands Regional Committee)

Jan King (4 years)
Board November 1990

The Venerable Andrew Curnow (6 years)
Board November 1988
Chair since November 1990

Prepared 29th November, 1993

THE RIGHT REVD MICHAEL B CHALLEN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR