

**BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1994**

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Chairman of the Board, the Right Reverend Oliver Heyward,
The Members of the Board,
The 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 1993 we focused on the celebration of 60 years of work by the Brotherhood of St Laurence in Melbourne.

What was the focus of 1994? The answer, in short, is assessment and review.

During the year we have participated in one external and three internal reviews, namely, the Industries Commission *Inquiry into Charitable Organisations*, completing the implementation of our own *Review of our Donated Goods Division*, the *Review of our Aged Services*, and the review of our whole organisation by the external consultants Cutler and Associates, which I called '*Directions 2000*'.

Each of these assessment exercises have understandably created concerns among staff, have caused us to clarify many of our expectations about what the Brotherhood of St Laurence is committed to, and have encouraged us to be more intentional, more disciplined, and more accountable and effective in what we do.

The report of our whole organisation, *Directions 2000*, which has involved consultation with staff from all departments, will present the same types of challenges for us. Its recommendations, now approaching their final form, will be presented to your Board at an extended meeting on 2nd and 3rd December.

These recommendations will provide us with the undergirding principles of such significance that I recommend that the members of the Brotherhood of St Laurence gather together at a special meeting in February to hear them at first hand.

In part, these reviews have brought together compatible principles which is most reassuring as well as timely. A key principle in this confluence is that the purpose of any service or any work in social policy is to bring about 'positive social change'.

This concept requires the Brotherhood of St Laurence's basic role and purpose to be reflected in and supported by all its activities. In particular, the notion of

positive social change heightens the importance of each and all of our community services.

While our services are valid in their own right when related to people who are poor and who have little power, it is not sufficient to leave it at that. With the concept of positive social change to guide us, the provision of these services have an added function and quality - they have the potential to provide us with insights, understandings and initiatives to improve relevant social policies, whether our own policies and practices or those of government.

Thus, in 1994 we have enhanced the vital connection at a practical 'doing level' between our community services and social policy and research. Unifying these two aspects gives credibility and power to our advocacy role.

Our official Annual Report (which surely is most attractive and readable) provides you with a description of our many and diverse activities which are the natural outcome of having imaginative, passionate and dedicated staff, currently numbering 941 (as of August this year).

I want to publicly acknowledge the vital contribution, unswerving loyalty and wonderful persistence of all our Brotherhood staff. This has not wavered despite the enormous demands and considerable uncertainty they have had to endure, whether arising from the reviews, the changing and restricting

requirements of government, the changes in government policies and, of course, the continuing need of thousands of people they care for.

These pressures impact especially upon those who are interacting with those in most need - such as desperate parents wondering how they are going to cope with the rent, and the provision of food and clothing for their families.

In addition, I want to bring to your attention the wonderful work of our Fundraising department. Market competition is extremely vigorous and keen. Nevertheless, of our total income in 1994 of \$26,149,829 that department generated \$5,080,684 net as compared with \$5,229,478 net last year. Our congratulations and heartfelt thanks to the Fundraising staff and its Advisory Committee.

Similarly, our shops, backed by a vast reliable team of volunteers, raised \$977,684 in support of our services.

Combined with the commitment of our staff, my four years as Executive Director have been manageable and relatively free of stress because of the assistance of my team of six Directors - so enthusiastic, dedicated, loyal and professional. Indeed, they are great companions.

I have also been fortunate in having the full support of the Brotherhood's Board. I would like to thank them for both their personal and corporate support

and the work they have achieved this year. I also look forward to a continuing constructive and rewarding relationship with them in the forthcoming year.

I would also like to note with sadness the death of Lady Dorothy Reid, who was made a Life Member of the Brotherhood in 1992 in recognition of her service. She died in July of this year.

Well, where to now?

The reviews we have already undergone and the implementation of recommendations arising from 'Directions 2000' will mean that, as an organisation, we will be much more focused in what we do, more intentional about how we do it, and more critical of the outcomes in relation to achieving practical social change for those people who have little income and little power.

We will thereby have a direction and a clear set of principles by which we can decide how we respond to the impact on our community of changing and complex social and economic forces.

What this means for us in terms of policy and structure will be shared with you after the Board has responded to the final recommendations of 'Directions 2000'. However, in the meantime we can suggest what this means for a welfare organisation such as ours working for positive social change in our stressed and divided society.

I believe that we need to respond at three levels.

The first is on the level of philosophy and values.

While we might question the effect of ideas and principles in the shaping of individual attitudes and the structures of society, comparative history does show that key concepts of dignity, unity and justice are not only powerful and persistent, but they are also essential for the well-being of people and the cohesion of a society.

In today's world there is a pressing need to displace the prevalent utilitarian individualism which leads to social division and inequity with the more principled and integrating outlook of communitarianism.

As an organisation, we can promote these values in more concrete terms in many ways. For example:

- through the use of our 'Future of Work discussion kits';
- through a campaign to challenge Australians and our politicians to increase our income tax so that adequate supports will be available for people who are disadvantaged;
- through the formation of more groups of Companions of St Laurence; and
- through enlisting the active support of over 40,000 donors and 1,288 volunteers).

The second is through promoting the self-determination and independence of local people.

It is unfortunately the case that currently our nation, through its governments, is not of a mind to adequately support disadvantaged people or communities.

This is apparent by the growing practice of governments devolving services to 'for profit' or welfare organisations, making it very uncertain that those people who need these services the most will be able to have access to them.

Furthermore, it is arguable that a service approach to meeting human needs necessarily promotes dependency. On the grounds of effectiveness and efficiency, it makes more sense to promote self-determination and control among otherwise relatively powerless individuals, families, or communities.

During 1995 and 1996, the Brotherhood of St Laurence staff will be working through these kinds of goals in one or more communities.

The third level is through national policies.

Ideas count; participation by people count; and so do national policies. It is the distribution of the nation's wealth which creates or inhibits possibilities for people.

The main means by which this occurs are jobs, social wages (housing, health, education, community services, economic support) and taxation.

Characteristically, the Brotherhood of St Laurence provides well-researched critiques on each of these areas. We will need to continue vigorously our advocacy since each area is under attack, in spite of the growing human need among us.

In this regard, may I quote what I said at this year's Sambell Oration:

Vincent Fitzgerald (1993) in his official report to the Federal Treasurer, demonstrated that Australia has a lower total tax burden than the average for all OECD countries. In 1990, only the USA and Turkey had a lower tax as a proportion of national output, and now Australia has the lowest tax ratio.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence believes that both Australia's economy can bear, and Australians will accept, a higher tax regime if the additional revenue is directed to enabling people to have jobs.

While there are arguments that an increase in taxes can be a disincentive to either an individual or a business, it needs to be kept in mind that people are not entirely driven by raw self-interest and that funds for the improvement of various elements of infrastructure and the maintenance of social stability are to the advantage of businesses.

If the wealth of the nation and the key means of its distribution become defective through increased unemployment, then the other methods of distribution, namely taxation, and the social wage, need to be enhanced.

Our politicians, however, do not have the will to so act. It is for Australian citizens, knowing of the plight of their unemployed mates and their own relatively lower light tax burden, who need to ask for taxes to be increased sufficiently.

The Church [and the Brotherhood of St Laurence as such] could certainly initiate an education program which will lay the basis for an informed request of our governments and foster an electoral climate that makes the increase politically acceptable.

In conclusion, members and friends of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, you can see that we have a most exciting, challenging and strategic agenda before us.

I believe that we can contemplate undertaking such tasks because society expects it of the Brotherhood of St Laurence and it, in turn, has the backing of yourselves and our thousands of supporters.

These are positive, challenging and important tasks for all of us. And I look forward to working with all of our staff, and with your support, for the principles and beliefs which we all share.