

CLRI Welfare Forum

“The way we care”

**Current challenges for Catholic
social services in Australia**

August 15th 2006



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Dual Roles of Catholic social services

- | Church social welfare ministry at local, state and national level
 - | service delivery & development
 - | prophetic voice



Why the preferential option for the poor?

The prime purpose of this special commitment to the poor is to enable them to become active participants in the life of society. It is to enable all persons to share in and contribute to the common good.

Economic Justice for All # 88



Why the preferential option for the poor?

The 'option for the poor', therefore, is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. Rather it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community. The extent of their suffering is a measure of how far we are from being a true community of persons.



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Economic Justice for All # 88

Trends in society

- | Loss of sense of common good
- | Less support from extended families and community structures
- | Casualisation and deregulation of the workforce, coupled with greater demand for mobility
- | Greater individualisation of aspirations
- | Increasing differentiation between “deserving” and “undeserving” poor



Trends in Government policy

- | increasing “individualisation” of social problems – often blaming the poor for their own difficult circumstances
- | Simultaneous IR and Welfare reforms place low income earners at risk
- | ongoing “privatisation” and “deregulation” shifts risks to our services
- | shift away from provision of services – micromanagement rather than administration
- | contract punishment of those who oppose policy

Trends in Church

- | Welfare is not always seen as a mainstream activity of the church
- | Public identity of church is frequently captured by moral and ethical issues rather than welfare
- | Financial pressures and demographic trends are changing the shape of internal Church relationships
- | Currently a readiness to consider our structures in the social services sector



Challenges

- | To maintain the primacy of mission over the availability of funding
- | To preserve Catholic identity and ethos in funded services
- | Government management versus government administration means the independence of our services is challenged
- | Our structures are not optimal – lacking capacity to share resources and risks quickly



Catholic structures are not optimal

- | Government boundaries do not match diocesan boundaries
- | Our state structures are just emerging with National Office support
- | Diocesan funding is under pressure
- | Engagement with non-diocesan services is also emerging
- | National Office services are dependent on limited funding sources



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Examples of current issues – Family relationships

- | Recent Family Relationship Centres tender round sees only one Catholic agency funded in its own right
- | Agencies with stronger national and state structures were more successful
- | We have few models for investing locally, and sharing risk, in order to invest in national success



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Examples of current issues – Welfare to Work

- | “Work first” policy will shift 160,000 single parents and disability support pensioners on to Newstart allowance
- | Supported by harsh penalties for “participation failures”
- | Employment services “hardening” in some areas of policy
- | Government increasingly “manages” the program rather than “administering” the program – a model for the future of government



Imperatives

...along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word: love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word.



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Deus Caritas Est
No. 22

Imperatives

For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.

Deus Caritas Est
N.25



Imperatives

As a community, the Church must practise love. Love thus needs to be organised if it is to be an ordered service to the community. The awareness of this responsibility has had a constitutive relevance in the Church from the beginning...



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Deus Caritas Est
N.20

Current CSSA Priorities

- | Supporting better public policy
- | Building a strong network of Catholic social services



Current CSSA Priorities

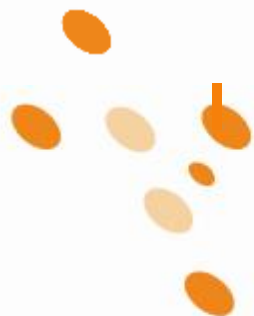
- | Social inequity
- | Welfare reform
- | Family support including work family balance
- | Mental health
- | Rural and remote



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Some Questions for Congregational leaders

- | How is the Catholic identity of social services expressed and maintained?
- | How is the commitment to developing a shared vision for Catholic social services at balanced at national, state and local level?
- | With whom do we collaborate, with whom do we compete (inside and outside the Catholic sector)?
- | How do we maximise the use of the very limited resources we all have to support good public policy and better social services?
- | What is the commitment to developing models and structures to deliver on that shared vision?



Some opportunities for Congregational leaders

- | Congregations have a history of work “at the edge” – gaps in government services will continue to grow.
- | The stories of Congregational efforts are almost as important as the stories of those they serve.
- | The charisms of Congregations can provide “insurance” against pure government outsourcing
- | We have opportunities to foster new national, state and local structures to support the development of good public policy and programs.



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