



## **'Is it realistic to expect Catholic counselling in a Catholic welfare agency?'**

Notes for a presentation to Catholic Bioethics Conference session on Evangelisation and Secularism

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### **1. Summary**

This paper considers counselling in Catholic agencies in the context of the role of the Church in social services, and the features of Catholic social services in Australia.

Counselling offered in Catholic agencies is non-directive and client-centred. Features that can be expected include professionalism, respect for clients, and a spirit of loving service; humility, an openness to the spiritual dimension; and a value base that reflects Catholic moral teaching on the value of marriage, that life begins at conception, and the importance of the family

Catholic social teaching informs the organisational setting for this counselling: accessible fee levels, for example.

Much of this service is now directed and delivered by people who are not practicing Catholics, including many who have made very significant contributions in advancing the Church's mission of loving service and work for justice.

A dialogue is needed within agencies and more broadly to ensure that people and processes are in place to maintain a continued focus on mission within Catholic agencies, and particularly in recruitment and in staff formation. This will include detailed consideration as to whether particular positions need a person who is a Catholic, or a Christian, etc.

These issues are important, because the services are important: they are needed by those who are served, and they are an integral part of the mission of the Church, whose members are compelled as Christians to 'heed the cry of the poor' within our society.

### **2. The role of the Church in social services**

#### **2.1 The centrality of social services**

The Church has always been active in the provision of social services. through the work of local communities, the development of monastic and hospitaller orders, through the prophetic founders in recent centuries of religious congregations and of lay associations; the initiative and innovation at diocesan and parish level; and the emergence in recent decades of both

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new congregations, and of lay-led organisations that carry on the mission of ageing congregations.

Moreover, these services are an integral part of her mission.

This is clearly established from scripture: As Christians, we seek to follow Jesus Christ, who calls us to service to others. Jesus taught this by his life, death and resurrection: He told us that he "came not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45).

And in his teaching he laid out clearly the priority to be given to service to others, and particularly to those who are poor or marginalised: "I tell you most solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40).

This has been acted on and reflected on through the ages: a recent account is found in the 2005 Encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love*:

As the years went by and the Church spread further afield, the exercise of charity became established as one of her essential activities, 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. (n 22)

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. (n 25)

## 2.2 Charity and justice

This work of charity is intimately connected with striving for social justice. Fr Joe Caddy, Chair of Catholic Social Services Australia, developed this theme in an address to this gathering three years ago<sup>1</sup>, and since then Pope Benedict put it in his third encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009):

*Charity goes beyond justice*, because to love is to give, to offer what is "mine" to the other; but [charity] never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is "his", what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting... Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it.... (n 6)

On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the *earthly city* according to law and justice. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving.... Charity always manifests God's love in human relationships as well, it gives theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world. (n 6)

As he pointed out in *Deus Caritas Est*, the Church's role in this is one of rational argument:

'[T]he pursuit of justice must be a fundamental norm of the State...' (n 26), but, as was pointed out in *Deus Caritas Est*, '[the Church] cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.' (n 29(a)).

Her role is Rational argument – the Church's social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live (n 27)



Bishop Peter Connors of Ballarat recently summarised this connection of love and justice in his 2009 Advent Pastoral Letter:

Through practices of generosity, courage, and compassion, these welfare organizations work to enhance peoples' dignity, meet their needs, improve their lives and make a difference to society. In another sense, they translate the Church's social teaching into policy and action.<sup>ii</sup>

The principles of Catholic social teaching, derived from the Gospels and the reflection of the Church on its social mission over the centuries, inform the work for justice of Catholic social service agencies. Various formulated, these principles can be summarised as follows:<sup>iii</sup>

- Respect for the dignity of the Human Person
- Community and the Common Good
- Justice, Rights and Responsibilities
- Option for the Poor
- Solidarity

### **2.3 Essential features of the Church's charitable service**

As Catholic social teaching provides a framework for bringing social justice to bear in particular situations, so are there a number of key features of how we are called to carry out the Church's work of service to those in need. Pope Benedict's *Deus Caritas Est* identified some 'essential elements':

#### ***Professional competence***

Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent: they should be properly trained in what to do and how to do it, and committed to continuing care. n 31

#### ***Dedication to others***

[P]rofessional competence ... is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church's charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they ...dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity.

Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a "formation of the heart": they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. ..n 31

#### ***Moved by Christ's love***

With regard to the personnel who carry out the Church's charitable activity on the practical level, ...more than anything, they must be persons moved by Christ's love, persons whose hearts Christ has conquered with his love, awakening within them a love of neighbour. (n 33)



### **humility**

Many of these reflections are both inspirational and terrifying, to us as individuals, and as managers or with other governance responsibilities. So it is with relief that we can reflect on the need for humility:

This proper way of serving others also leads to humility. ... We recognize that we are not acting on the basis of any superiority or greater personal efficiency, but because the Lord has graciously enabled us to do so. ...n 35

### **Cooperation with others**

Interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church cannot fail to dispose charity workers to work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples. (Deus Caritas Est, n 34)

This outward orientation is quite central to our broader mission. We have an opportunity to 'uncover the presence of Christ to the broader community', as Fr Joe Caddy has put it <sup>iv</sup> It relates to guidance provided by Archbishop Hart:

We must dismiss two extremes: One is to see ourselves as a Catholic ghetto, whereby we do not want to co-operate in any government instrumentality in any way, retiring from the world and setting up a Catholic club. That is not what we do as Catholics.<sup>v</sup>

One of the drivers for this engagement is that, as Father Ranson of Broken Bay Diocese has put it "We discover who we are in relationship with those whom we discover to be different from ourselves."<sup>vi</sup>

This dialogue challenges us, at all levels. As Bishop Putney of Townsville has reflected:

The major task of the Catholic Church in Australia at this point in its history may well be to find the language to describe to itself, and to others, who it is in this non-religious, secular context."<sup>vii</sup>

This emphasis is not novel. Clarity, humility, confidence and prudence were identified by Pope Paul VI<sup>viii</sup> as key elements in the evangelical dialogue to which we are called. Pope John Paul II endorsed the centrality of this sophisticated dialogue with the world.<sup>ix</sup>

This new apologetic will also need to breathe a spirit of humanity, that compassionate humility which understands people's anxieties and questions and which is not quick to presume in them ill will or bad faith. At the same time, it will not yield to a sentimental sense of the love and compassion of Christ sundered from the truth, but will insist instead that true love and compassion can make radical demands, precisely because they are inseparable from the truth which alone sets us free (cf. *Jn* 8: 32).

This dialogue needs to be within our agencies as well – I comment further on this later.

## **3. Catholic social services in Australia**

### **3.1 Size and composition of Catholic social services**



Catholic social services agencies are a significant presence in Australia.

A 2004 ACU survey of the Catholic social services sector in Australia reported that, for those agencies that responded, there were 8,337 staff members and 19,000 volunteers, providing services to more than 500,000 people<sup>x2</sup>. The survey notes that their data understates the total picture: among the agencies not included, St Vincent de Paul in Victoria assisted more than 300,000 people last year.<sup>xi</sup> Current estimates from Catholic Social Services Australia are that these agencies are serving more than one million Australians a year, with staff numbers in excess of 10,000, and expenditures on programs of more than \$500,000 a year.

There is a large number of organisations involved. In a 2004 ACU survey<sup>xii</sup> questionnaires were processed from 108 Catholic social service organisations.

59% of these were auspiced by religious orders, 34% of them were diocesan and the remaining 7 organisations either lay associations or parish entities.

And it is a dynamic sector: 22% of those who provided relevant information to the ACU survey had been established since 1976, ie, in the last 30 years. And in the other direction, there has been significant consolidation activity, which continues today: membership of Catholic Social Services Victoria has virtually halved over the past 15 years, to 35 members today, due to consolidation within the sector.

This process of consolidation is continuing, but it has not advanced on the scale evident in the Anglican or Uniting Churches, where amalgamation and federation among agencies has reduced the number of providers in Australia to single digits. Many of the Catholic agencies remain quite small by comparison.

### **3.2 Types of services provided**

The range of services extends across the fields of human need in Australia, with the 2004 ACU Survey providing a useful snapshot of recent arrangements:

- Training vocational and employment services
- Counselling and support
- School focused services
- Accommodation placement and services for those who are homeless
- Out of home care for children and young people
- Services for the aged, and those with disabilities
- Financial and material assistance
- Drug and alcohol, and mental health services

To these main categories can be added many others:

- Pre-schools

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<sup>2</sup> There is a dearth of current comprehensive information about Catholic social services in Australia, including on those aspects of organisations under discussion here. A project to find out more, and to underpin support for future development is a priority need.



- Community development
- Chaplaincy services in health care, prisons etc
- Juvenile justice diversion, etc

Services develop as needs develop or are identified. The response to the February 2009 bushfires in Victoria is a recent example of service development: with funding from the Catholic community, Catholic agencies developed community re-development programs aimed at strengthening affected communities over the medium term as they recover from the tragedy of 12 months ago.

Innovation in the development of services as needs change has also been a feature of Catholic social services, as highlighted each year in CSSA's awards for excellence and innovation in service provision. One local example that was prominent late last year when the Australian Parliament offered an apology to the 500,000 Australians who had been in institutional care as children, is the heritage information centre at MacKillop Family Services. Through the provision of information and related services, the Centre ministers to former residents of orphanages and other children's institutions in Victoria.<sup>xiii</sup> It thus builds on and extends the work of the Christian Brothers, the Josephite Sisters and the Sisters of Mercy who conducted the institutions and organisations that ten years ago were amalgamated into MacKillop Family Services.

### 3.3 Who are our services for?

There was a time when a range of the services provided by Catholic agencies were intended primarily for the Catholic community, where material needs were great and the availability of services lacking.

Some of the services of Catholic agencies in Australia are still targeted primarily at the Catholic community – some chaplaincy services; pre-marriage education; counselling services for Catholic school communities, for example. Care for aged priests and religious is a group of services that meet needs within the Catholic community. And many Catholic services, in aged care and relationship counselling, for example, tend to attract a Catholic clientele. That is as it should be. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in *Deus Caritas Est*,

Without in any way detracting from this commandment of universal love, the Church also has a specific responsibility: within the ecclesial family no member should suffer through being in need. The teaching of the Letter to the Galatians is emphatic: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (6:10). (n25 (b))

But this is not the main focus of Catholic social services today.

The mission of Catholic social service agencies, working on behalf of, and as an integral part of, the Church in Australia today, is today firmly focused on the needs of the whole community. This flows from Catholic social teaching, and from the scriptures:

[Charity] extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter "by chance" (cf. *Lk* 10:31), whoever they may be." (*Deus Caritas Est*, n 25 (b))



The opening words of the 1965 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World still both inform and inspire:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted these are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ.<sup>xiv</sup>

### 3.4 Funding of Catholic social services

Prior to the last half century, the range of services delivered by dioceses and religious orders were largely funded by those bodies<sup>xv</sup>, but Governments are now the main sources of funds.

Camilleri and Winkworth report<sup>xvi</sup> that, in 2004, 43% of organisations received more than 75% of their funding from Government sources, and more than 80% received at least 50% of their funding from Government. The proportion of Government funding seems to continue to increase.

By way of illustration of the changes that have taken place: the family and relationship counselling programs of Centacare agencies first received Government funding in the 1970's, and are now 100% Commonwealth Government funded in a number of agencies.

These funding increases in recent years have enabled an expansion of services and of agency presence, at a rate that might be unprecedented. One example: the introduction of Federally funded Family Relationship Centres in 2005 added significantly to the turnover of those Catholic and other community sector agencies who were successful in bidding to run the Centres – Catholic agencies are involved in the running of 27 of the 85 centres now operating<sup>xvii</sup>. This program is 100% government funded, and has added annual income of an estimated \$25 million to Catholic agencies.

But this funding pattern raises a range of issues.

An element of uncertainty and, in some cases, disruption has accompanied this reliance: the re-tendering in 2008 of employment-related services resulted in significant losers, and some winners, within the church sector generally.<sup>xviii</sup>

An increase in the number of Government-initiated programs has required agencies to reflect more carefully and more systematically on the mission alignment of program options.

- In 2006 Catholic social services organisations (and others from the community sector) declined to participate in a program to quarantine Centerlink benefit payments as a punishment for non-compliance<sup>xix</sup>.
- Agencies had to collectively and individually consider whether job network programs, family relationship centres, and a range of other initiatives were areas where they could make a positive contribution without compromising their values or their mission.
- In the case of the federally funded pregnancy counselling initiatives that were the focus of Fr Caddy's paper to this gathering in 2007, there was a need for formal involvement by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.<sup>xx</sup>

In some programs, the extent of Government intervention is significant, extending to requirements that external signage show only Government branding. Circumstances such as these increase the importance of internal arrangements within agencies to ensure that the organisation is indeed focused on the mission of the organisation and not just on the contractual requirements of the funding partner.



As In an address in March 2009 to leaders of Catholic health, education and social service providers in the Archdiocese, Archbishop Denis Hart has reflected, that, while it is our mission to engage with the world we much avoid the extreme that we

see ourselves as no different from any government instrumentality. Of course, we are Christians, but we keep this to ourselves. We make the faith private and personal. By doing so we dumb down Catholic identity, we become politically correct, we do not offend anybody, we cease to proclaim Christ visually or vocally in our workplace.<sup>xxi</sup>

The increase in Government funding has been accompanied by other changes.

- The 2004 survey showed that 61% of organisations received less than 10% of their income from donations.
- 46% of Diocesan agencies received no funding from their diocese.

There are some suggestions that in some areas the Church is now less able to support core social services for the local community without significant Government funding<sup>xxii</sup> This is a strategic issue for some agencies, and for the Church as a whole.

### **3.5 Composition of staff**

There have been two major changes in staffing composition over recent decades: Clerical and religious staff are now rare in Catholic social service agencies; and, as Frank Quinlan of Catholic Social Services Australia noted two years ago:

the workforce is largely non-Catholic, and where it is Catholic it is frequently non-practicing.<sup>xxiii</sup>

To take one example. Fr Gerard Dowling is the longest serving counsellor at Centacare Catholic Family Services in Melbourne. When he commenced there in the 1963 there were four counselors, all of them priests. The CEO is currently a priest, Fr Joe Caddy; there remain two part time clerical counselors, and a number of religious in chaplaincy and other services, but the overwhelming majority of managers and staff there are lay.

That experience probably under-reflects the changes across the sector. Religious remain a strong presence in some areas of aged care, and two Centcares, in the Dioceses of Wilcandia-Forbes and Geraldton, are led by religious women. But Fr Joe is the only clerical CEO of a major Catholic agency, and one of a small number of priests Australia-wide whose full time ministry is in social services. Staff, managers, and Board members are overwhelmingly lay.

There is further change to come. A significant number of people currently in leadership positions have had at least some clerical or religious formation. That will not be the case in ten years time.

At the CEO level, there are only three major Catholic social services agencies headed by a priest or religious, and of the lay leaders, a number of key leaders of our organisations are not Catholic. In some agencies, most managers would not be Catholic. And the change is much greater at general staffing levels (although I'm not aware of any hard data on this.)

Among these are inspirational leaders, who have made very significant contributions in advancing the Church's mission of loving service and work for justice. There are many who are committed Christians, whose faith and commitment is an inspiration to their colleagues. In some cases, it is these personnel who carry the mission of the agency forward. Other faiths too are well represented.



But it is a major change that managers and staff are now not generally practicing Catholics, and there are some implications of this, which are picked up below.

### **3.6 Formal links with the broader Church**

Catholic social service providers are linked in many ways to the broader Church in Australia and beyond. One dimension of this is the formal linkages. As Fr Brian Lucas, General Secretary of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, recently pointed out: 'there has to be some external basis for identifying a community, or particular activities, or institutions as Catholic. Something is not 'Catholic' just because it wants to say it is.'<sup>xxiv</sup>

Canon Law provides a starting point, when it provides that 'no association may call itself 'catholic' except with the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority...'<sup>xxv</sup>

As noted earlier, some organisations are diocesan based, and thus responsible to local bishops; those auspiced by religious congregations share in the relationship that those congregations have with the bishops, etc. And collectively, Catholic Social Services Australia is commissioned by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, and, at a regional level, Catholic Social Services Victoria is auspiced by the bishops of that State and the Conference of Religious Superiors, as well as by member organisations.

Nor is this a matter of control, or of hierarchy for their own sake: it's about having a structure to advance and guide the mission of the Church, of bringing Christ's love to the world.

These links are very much a starting point; a basis that must be built on: Fr Brian Lucas goes on in his article to suggest that 'Catholic identity is fundamentally about the lived proclamation of the gospel:

Fidelity to the Word and the lived expression of Christian love are the foundations of Christian life. These form the basis on which bishops can assess whether the mission and identity of an institution is truly 'Catholic'.<sup>xxvi</sup>

## **4. Counselling<sup>3</sup>**

### **4.1 Types of counselling**

The term 'counselling' covers a wide field, with Wikipedia listing around 40 'therapeutic modalities', ranging from grief therapy to career counselling.<sup>xxvii</sup>

In its most general usage, it applies to, or is an element of most social service activities. More narrowly defined, as is more usual, the main types of counselling offered by Catholic social services are characterised by Camilleri and Winkworth<sup>xxviii</sup> as

- individual and family
- young people and their families

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<sup>3</sup> My perspective on counselling in Catholic agencies is that of a manager, of one who has worked with counsellors in a number of organisational settings, and of one who has discussed with many counsellors the nature of their work and its relationship to the mission of Catholic organisations. As noted earlier, I am indebted to a number of experienced counsellors from a range of Catholic organisations for recent discussions in the course of preparation of this presentation.



- employee assistance

to these can be added

- drug and alcohol counselling
- pregnancy support
- and counselling associated with a range of other programs: bushfire relief, and post-institution information being two of those mentioned earlier.

It should be noted that, even where counselling is a core function, it is only part of the activity of Catholic social services agencies. At an aggregate level, Camilleri and Winkworth estimated that 'counselling and support' services – a category broader than just counselling - accounted for 13% of people assisted by respondent agencies. Nevertheless, they are important: for the tens of thousands of people directly involved, for the society to which they minister, and to all those with an interest in the provision of these services. They are also important because they are the core service around which a number of agencies, Centacares in particular, have grown, and they thus loom particularly large in agency culture.

## 4.2 Counselling and the Church

The relationship between psychology and counselling and the Church has evolved over time: often quoted is the 1992 centennial address to the American Psychological Association: “.. if we learn that someone is devoutly religious, or even tends in that direction, we look upon that person with puzzlement, often concluding the psychologists obviously had personal problems”<sup>xxxix</sup>.

Non-directive counselling, developed by Carl Rogers and others in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was part of a change in this relationship. One suggestion is that part of the reason for this is an alignment between the content of non-directive counselling and scriptural based pastoral care: the principle of 'truth as liberating', and the 'genuine esteem and empathy' to be shown the client, align closely with Gospel teaching.<sup>xxx</sup>

## 4.3 Non-directive counselling

In any case, it has been generally accepted for many decades in the social services in Australia that counselling should be non-directive – that, in relation to decision making, it serves to assist a person in their own process of discernment.<sup>xxxi</sup><sup>xxxii</sup>

In 2006, in the context of controversy about the involvement of Catholic agencies in then-proposed Government pregnancy support services, the Commission for Doctrine and Morals of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference issued 'Preliminary Advice on Pregnancy Support and Counselling Services'. A key issue for the bishops was to clarify what counselling involves. Their Advice included the following definition:<sup>xxxiii</sup>

3. Decision-making counselling is client-centered and non-directive and aims to assist a person making a decision by:
  - a) Providing emotional support, time and place so that the client can make a decision that is reflective rather than panicked;
  - b) Assisting a client to talk through the problem(s) facing her by examining options and their implications for the client's own values;



- c) Assisting the client to clarify her own sense of self in relation to a new problem and to make reasonable decisions for herself about what she wants now and in the long term;
- d) Assisting the client to make reasonable decisions in relation to others;
- e) Informing and exploring with the client the availability of emotional and other support;
- f) Indicating to the client the need to seek medical or other professional services in relation to her pregnancy and encouraging her to seek that assistance from her own doctor or from another doctor or professional.

This definition would be widely accepted. It is what non-directive counselors do. But there are many other dimensions of the encounter that can make a difference, and in these dimensions Catholic agencies see themselves as different from some others.

#### **4.4 The agency setting**

All the features of Catholic social services generally, of the application of Catholic social teaching, etc, impact on the offering of counselling services.

As seen above, they indicate a general approach that respects the dignity of the person, is respectful, and demonstrates the love of a hitherto unknown neighbour that the parable of the Good Shepherd calls us to. This is a defining feature of our services.

Working in cooperation with others in the community has practical consequences: linkages and referrals to other services, enhanced ability to address the totality of a person's needs.

A very practical aspect of the application of Catholic social teaching is our approach to affordability. Catholic counselling agencies around the country have many clients referred to them from other not-for-profit counselling agencies who have fee policies that screen out those who can't afford to pay.

#### **4.5 Moral underpinnings**

Non-directive counselling does not take place in a moral vacuum. It is recognised by commentators, agencies and practitioners that moral beliefs of the counsellor impact on the conduct of non-directional counselling.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

This is reflected in the CSSA Code of Ethics, which states:

CSSA supports:

- the sanctity and dignity of human life from the moment of its conception until death
- the sanctity of marriage
- the fundamental and central role of the family in society..<sup>xxxv</sup>

One practice manager in a large agency recently outlined the approach of that agency in relation to relationship counselling:

- Within a non-directive counselling model, the counsellor would be "an advocate for the relationship - Most people want you to fight for the relationship, and if you are neutral then the relationship is not likely to survive." This still requires that the clients must



make the decisions required, but in examining the situation and in exploring options, the counsellor is not neutral as to the value of the relationship's enduring.

- She explained that this is part of the culture of the agency, the message given to practitioners in in-service training and clinical supervision, a shared value among senior practitioners. This is a feature of counselling in Catholic agencies that distinguishes them from some other agencies working in the field.

Several other managers and counsellors I have spoken to recently spoke in similar terms. There was a general sense that staff are excited by the articulation of a position of support for the relationship, and that this is seen by staff as an important distinguishing feature as between Catholic agencies and some of the other major service providers in this area.

Pregnancy counselling is another a much smaller area of agency practice, with some of the larger agencies seeing quite small numbers of clients in this area. But it is an area where there are specific expectations from a Catholic agency.

The CSSA Code of Ethics statement is very clear: that it supports 'the sanctity and dignity of human life from the moment of its conception'. This is complemented by the provision that:

CSSA recognises that staff may be drawn from many religious traditions. It is the responsibility of leadership to ensure Catholic values are understood, applied and demonstrated, while at the same time respecting and valuing other faith traditions.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Together, these set out a clear expectation of the approach that the agency will take, within the setting of non-directive counselling.

All my recent discussions have noted the challenge in ensuring value and mission alignment among staff. Key instruments in advancing this alignment include

- In service training
- professional supervision,
- policy and procedural documentation, etc.

But there some sense that these systems do not uniformly deal with the issue of values and their application in counselling, and that continued work is needed to integrate these issues with the recruitment process, etc. This is referred to below.

#### **4.6 Spirituality**

The discipline of social work has not always been sympathetic to consideration of spiritual or religious issues, by practitioners, or clients, and these issues have thus often been excluded from professional courses and from the workplace. Professor Beth Crisp of Deakin University, has documented a change in the social work profession generally over recent decades towards a recognition of the importance of the spiritual dimension of human well being, and of the relevance of this dimension to counselling.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Longer serving Catholic agency practitioners advise in discussion that they have traditionally been fully aware of this, and have factored it into their non-directive practice, opening up to the client the option of considering issues of faith and prayer where this seems relevant.

Esther's Voice, a collaboration between three Melbourne agencies, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services, MacKillop Family Services, and Jesuit Social Services, is currently undertaking a project around spirituality in human services<sup>xxxviii</sup> In a paper contributing to that project, Crisp argues that Catholic agencies have made a distinctive contribution to social



welfare provision in Australia 'by offering models of service delivery which have sought not to excise the spiritual from the more prosaic needs with which individuals present...<sup>xxxix</sup>.

However, she stresses that the continued development of such an approach involves a whole of agency approach, and can't be left to individual staff members.

While 'Catholic counselling' is not a term in current use, 'Christian counselling' is used. As one Australian private practice, Bridges Counselling in Parramatta, describes this work:

Counselling, as we practice it, utilises the best, contemporary, professionally recognised and evidence-based counselling practices. .. For Christian clients, the Christian dimension is a vital part of their life. These clients want their values, beliefs and spiritual struggles respected, and choosing a Christian counsellor or Christian psychologist is often the easiest way to ensure that.<sup>xl</sup>

Many Catholics seeking the assistance of a counsellor would identify with these sentiments, and what is described here is fully consonant with what Crisp describes as the practice within Catholic agencies. They do not involve intruding a spiritual dimension into the counselling, but being open to addressing the needs of the whole person, in light of all that they identify as important to them.

Another Australian 'Christian counselling' practitioner, Peter J Allen & Associates, extend the term further. They advertise that in their practice psychologists will "... teach you strategies which are likely to assist you in coping with your psychological difficulties, while encouraging you to understand your struggles in the context of your relationship with Jesus'<sup>xli</sup>

This formulation takes things a stage further. My understanding is that most Catholic agencies would see this approach as mixing non-directive counselling with spiritual guidance. It is not language that senior practitioners I have spoken to are comfortable with. But further consideration of the spiritual dimensions of counselling, as Esther's Voice is considering, might make all of this clearer.

## **5. Some pressing issues**

### **5.1 Focus on mission**

The goals, principles, priorities and values of Catholic agencies are all derived from the life and teachings of Jesus, as reflected on by the Church. If this connection between Catholic agencies and the Church as a whole is broken, then the features or the future of the services to be provided cannot be assured.

Careful consideration is needed as to what level of involvement by committed Catholic personnel - and by committed Christians more generally, as well as professionals of other faiths and commitments - is needed at various levels to ensure that this core part of the Church's mission can flourish. This dialogue is underway in many areas, and it needs to continue, within agencies as well as within religious congregations, dioceses, etc.

To a significant extent, we reveal our identity in what we do, and how we do it. With their Catholic colleagues, many of the committed managers and staff who are not themselves Catholic are nevertheless well placed to continue to develop their agencies as Catholic organisations, including through such actions as continuing

- To talk about these issues, get them on the agenda within our organisations
- To draw on the traditions and teachings of the Gospels and the Church in focusing on mission, analysing issues, and following up with actions



- Ensure that service is focused on the dignity of the person, and delivered with loving care
- Ensure that their service is linked to work for justice
- Ensure that recruitment, formation are mission focused
- Ensure we are open to working with others on shared goals, while maintaining a clear focus on our own mission

But if senior management of an organisation does not, as a group, retain a close connection with the Church, then the link between that organisation and the church as a whole, would wither. This would apply even more strongly to the governance level within an organisation. This leads to issues of recruitment and staff formation.

## 5.2 Staff Recruitment

Michael Yore, for many years CEO of Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services in Melbourne, outlined his approach to a Melbourne Archdiocesan Seminar on 19 March 2009:

Staff, and particularly senior staff are 'culture carriers', 'recruitment for mission' is essential. A commitment to the instruction from St Matthew's gospel, to social justice for the most vulnerable and powerless is the bottom line, along with a willingness to do this within the culture and tradition of a particular Catholic organisation<sup>xlii</sup>

We need the best person for the job, but the job is not merely technical in nature. A full understanding of the requirements thus need to be specified, and understood within the agency; and procedures need to be put in place to recruit along those lines.

At a minimum, all staff need to be able to make the commitment that Michael has outlined – to fully support the gospel inspired mission and values of the organisation.

And, as in order to carry out their functions effectively, and to sustain them, Catholic bodies need to be able to recruit and manage staff in light of the Catholic nature of the organisations. As a result of the dialogue on identity discussed earlier, consideration will need to be given as to whether particular positions need a person who is a Catholic, or a Christian, etc.

## 5.3 Staff formation

Service provision depends on current personnel, who need to be supported and nurtured. Effective ongoing formation in the Catholic dimensions of their mission, as well as in other professional and administrative areas, is essential.

There is inspiring work underway. Esther's Voice has been mentioned; there are induction programs, formation days, professional supervision, etc at most agencies. In many areas there is a deep culture of engagement on these issues.

This requires a serious commitment from management and governance levels. It requires support from peak bodies, and cooperation across the sector.

Essential to success here is a culture of openness and dialogue within our organisations. If we don't have a culture where issues of mission and spirituality can be readily discussed, then the organisation will not mature in these dimensions, and their clients will be the poorer for this. But such a dialogue doesn't come easily in many parts of 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia.

Experienced counsellor and commentator Ray Reid emphasises this point: an internal dialogue needs to be maintained, and the language of loving and caring is more likely to resonate with workers in Catholic agencies<sup>xliii</sup>

Work is required beyond individual agencies, and there are programs and activities underway, and under development. Congratulations to CSSA on a senior management Enrichment



program that it organised last year, involving 25 senior managers from around Australia in a five week development program based in Rome and Leuven, Belgium. The sector needs to continue to develop leaders, not just in technical and professional competencies, but in their spirituality, understanding of the Gospel vision, and of Catholic social teaching.

## 6. Conclusion

It is realistic to expect Catholic counselling in a Catholic welfare agency.

There are discernible elements in counselling that one can expect from Catholic agencies:

- Professionalism
- Respect
- Loving service
- Humility
- An openness to the spiritual dimension
- A value base that reflects Catholic moral teaching

And the rich fabric of Catholic teaching and tradition that build's on Christ's exhortation to love our neighbour, informs the agencies that deliver these services.

There are significant issues to be addressed within the Catholic social services sector to ensure that we can continue to effectively carry out the Church's mission of loving service, including counselling. These include ensuring that people and processes are in place to maintain a continued focus on mission within the agency, and particularly in recruitment and in staff formation. These issues are important, because our services are important: they are needed by those we serve, and they are an integral part of the mission of the Church, whose members are compelled as Christians to 'heed the cry of the poor' within our society.

Much is being done, but there is much that still needs to be done: Pope Benedict's reflection in *Deus Caritas Est* on one of the features of Catholic service keeps this in context:

"In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord." n35

## Notes

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<sup>iii</sup> Catholic Charities USA (The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching, at <http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=297>, accessed 21 January 2010

<sup>iv</sup> Fitzgerald D (2009c) 'Catholic identity: focus on mission', *Kairos*, 19 April 2009, Archdiocese of Melbourne

<sup>v</sup> Hart D (2009) 'Archbishop speaks on Catholic identity' *Kairos*, Vol 20, Issue 5, 5 April 2009 [http://www.kairos.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1435:archbishop-denis-hart&catid=31:local-news-archive&Itemid=41](http://www.kairos.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1435:archbishop-denis-hart&catid=31:local-news-archive&Itemid=41) accessed 19 January 2009

<sup>vi</sup> Ranson D (2008) A service shaped by Catholic Identity at pp 83-99 in Ormerod N (ed) 2008 *Identity and Mission in Catholic Agencies* St Pauls, Strathfield

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<sup>viii</sup> Pope Paul VI (1964) *Ecclesiam Suam*, Encyclical On The Church, August 6, 1964 [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_06081964\\_ecclesiam\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam_en.html) accessed 19 January 2010

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<sup>x</sup> Camilleri, P. and Winkworth, G. (2004) Mapping the Catholic social services. *Australasian Catholic Record*, 81(2): 184-197.

<sup>xi</sup> St Vincent de Paul Society (2009) St Vincent de Paul Society 2008/2009 Annual Report, Victoria

<sup>xii</sup> Camilleri, P. and Winkworth, G. (2004) Mapping the Catholic social services. *Australasian Catholic Record*, 81(2): 184-197.

<sup>xiii</sup> Murray, S., Malone, J. and Glare, J. (2008) 'Building a life story: Providing records and support to former residents of children's homes'. *Australian Social Work*, 61(3): 239-255. Note too that innovation has been a feature of the broader not-for-profit sector in Australia – see Productivity Commission (2009) *Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector – Draft Research Report* Productivity Commission Canberra, at p 9.2

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