



Report from Executive Director for 2010 AGM, 11 March 2010

Chairman, Bishop Tomlinson, members, guests, friends all:

Thank you for joining us today.

At Catholic Social Services Victoria we work to assist the Catholic Church in Victoria to respond to the Gospel imperatives of compassionate service and of work for justice.

Our member organisations - many of you here today - are outstanding in the wide range of services you provide, as you stand with and serve those who are poor, disadvantaged and marginalised.

CSSV works to support these endeavours in a number of ways. We are very conscious of how much we don't do, and of how far we fall short of our aspirations, and of your aspirations. But we are pleased, in our Annual Report, to outline what has been done over the past year, and to touch on some points today.

In reflecting on our **Advocacy** work:

This time last year we faced dire predictions of the impact of the Global Financial Crisis, and now we face an unemployment rate that is heading towards historical low levels. Globally, we see the continued rapid growth of the major Asian economies, but a failure to agree on how to tackle major environmental threats to global wellbeing, and natural disasters on a massive scale.

What remains a constant is that, at every turn, those who are poor, marginalised and disadvantaged are the most vulnerable: the least able to benefit from economic upturn; the most vulnerable to the vicissitudes of ecological deterioration and natural disaster.

As followers of Christ we are called to work for a world based on true justice between peoples; on respect for the dignity of each human person; on solidarity between all people; on care for and an equitable sharing of the resources of the earth. We are called to share with others the hope that we receive from Christ.

In partnership with members who have relevant experience and expertise, CSSV advocates on behalf of those we serve. In effect, this enables all members of the Catholic social services community to be represented in the public arena, and to pursue their social justice objectives.

There are many issues to be addressed, and many groups in need of special attention:

- The resourcing of so many of our services: out of home care; the aged, those with disabilities, and their carers
- Victorian Budget priorities – including gathering adequate revenue
- Homelessness



- Pressures on poor households, including increases in energy bills; and the special needs of indigenous communities and families
- Promotion of true Human Rights, based on the inherent dignity of each person, including Freedom of religion
- Due regard to the rights of those imprisoned, and a focus on enabling them to live a full life when they leave prison.

Our advocacy cannot focus only on Government and Parliament. In so many areas, the values and attitude of the broader community is also critical to the building of a just society – perhaps most obviously the case in relation to a just reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians, but also critical in so many other areas, including transition from prison, building pathways out of homelessness etc.

Member support is another area of focus.

We endeavour to strengthen the community of shared identity within Catholic social services, and to promote cooperation and initiatives, to assist individual agencies where appropriate, and to maximise the impact of our services collectively on those within the Victorian community who are most in need.

Cooperation and the deepening of relations between member agencies was a feature of several aspects of our work during the year, including that of developing a post-bushfire response from the Catholic community; and the promotion of cooperation between the various Centacare agencies. Closer cooperation is appropriate when it can provide a better outcome for the communities that we serve.

Member gatherings, included the Commissioning Mass/AGM and the annual dinner, were well attended by member agencies and the broader Catholic social services community. This provides a base for much other cooperation.

We work to assist the Catholic social services sector reflect on its **Catholic identity**. This also feeds into our advocacy agenda, and our member support.

Central to the Catholic identity work that is outlined in our Annual Report is our efforts to better understand the implications for our service and our work for justice of the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Catholic social teaching provides a strong base here – it comprises the reflections of the Church over the centuries, based on the scriptures, and on our experience in standing with those who are poor and disadvantaged. And it is also up to us as a community

It is up to us to ensure that this Catholic identity makes a difference to those whom we serve.

Ensuring effective liaison between social services and the Church as a whole is part of this Catholic identity focus.

**We work with a wide range of people and organisations.**

Firstly, our member organisations, their leaders and their people generally. In other forums we have thanked and farewelled Michael Yore of Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services and Paul Linossier a past Chair of CSSV as well as the founding CEO at MacKillop Family Services. And we welcome today Micaela Cronin and Chris Walsh as the new CEO's of MacKillop and Good Shepherd. Arda Tymensen of Centacare Gippsland retired recently after a decade of leadership and service; Arda is here today, as too is her successor, Jamie Edwards. We all wish each of them very well.

The Bishops of Victoria auspice our work, and their interest and cooperation is central for our effectiveness. So too is the cooperation and support of many others within the Church – the Religious Congregations, Episcopal Vicars, etc. To single out one: Catholic Social Services Australia, which assists us in many ways, part-funds our work, and which is the main conduit for advocacy etc at the national level for the Catholic social service sector.

Without the contribution of our Chair, Peter Bearsley, and the members of the CSSV Council the organisation would be much diminished. Their wisdom, commitment and availability is very much appreciated.

There are also many others, individuals and organisations, who are part of this work, to whom we are also very grateful. They include:

- Colleagues from other Churches,
- The Victorian Council of Social Services, the Council to Homeless Persons, and the other peak bodies operating in Victoria
- Those in Government, Parliament and in other organisations who share our goals and who strive with us to support human dignity and the development of a more just society

Conclusion

It has been a privilege to represent the Catholic social services sector during 2009, and to work with such a dedicated and gifted group of people. My colleagues, Terry O'Shannassy and Emmy Silvius, and I look forward to continuing to work with our members and the many others with whom we cooperate.

May our work, as part of the Church, join with yours in making us even more effective in standing with those who need us most, and in whom we meet the face of Christ.

Thank you.

Denis Fitzgerald
Executive Director